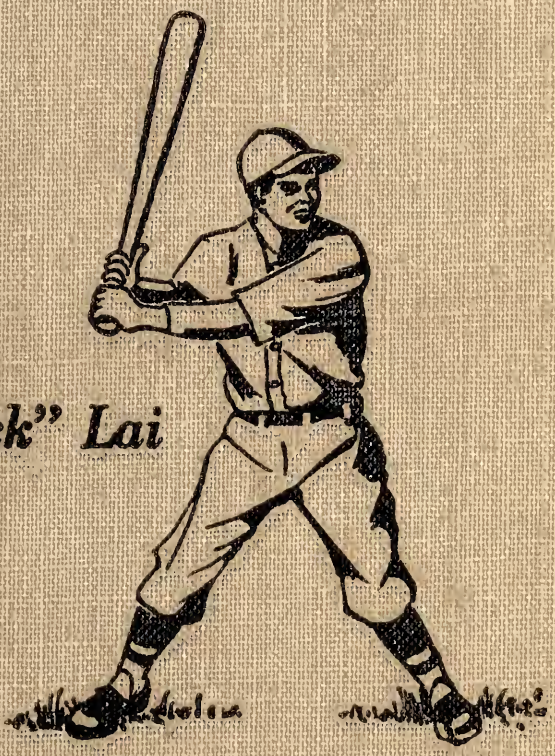
CHAMPIONSHIP BASEBALL

From Little League to Big League



William T. "Buck" Lai

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CHAMPIONSHIP BASEBALL

RED,
THE BEST OF LUCK IN
YOUR NEW PEA PATCH.
Buck

CHAMPIONSHIP BASEBALL

From Little League to Big League

William T. "Buck" Lai

Scout, Brooklyn Dodgers
Athletic Director,
Long Island University

Illustrated by the author

New York: 1954
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To

Mom and Dad

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FOREWORD

THE MOST ELABORATE BASEBALL PROGRAM OF SPECIAL INSTRUCTION and physical conditioning takes place every spring in Dodgertown, U.S.A. "Dodgertown" is a 200-acre training camp located at Vero Beach, Florida that has been leased by President Walter O'Malley for the use of the Brooklyn Dodgers and their minor league clubs through 1972. The camp has been called the "College of Baseball" by outstanding figures in the game, and attendance may actually cut the apprenticeship a player must serve in the minor leagues by one or two years. A month's concentrated training in Dodgertown may be equal to a year's experience in minor league competition. At the camp the Class-D rookie can enjoy the same facilities and instruction as the Dodgers.

A few years ago the *Sporting News* commented, "For all its numbers the camp is not an impersonal assembly line. All clubs have managers who quickly get to know their players. Two or three scouts check every workout and every camp. It is here that the fine combing of players is a visual reality, and under conditions which may well be a pattern for most major league organizations in the future."

Buck Lai, scout and instructor for the Dodgers and Athletic Director at Long Island University, has incorporated in this book the techniques of teaching baseball skills developed at the Dodgers' "College of Baseball."

In addition, Buck has gone one step further: he has had the young player in mind at all times while writing and illustrating his book. The book is thus doubly successful: it contains the skills and instructions acquired during Buck's more than 20 years in baseball, and at the same time it is written for the average sandlot player in a language he will understand and illustrated with drawings that will appeal to youngsters as well as instruct them. Buck has avoided the conventional, dry, technical style usually found in instructional books. With imagination and an insight into the problems of the average player, he has come up with a book that will enable youngsters to understand actual major league instruction.

Although it is written and illustrated to appeal strongly to young players, I'm sure that coaches and fans will find the book invaluable for their purposes. Buck has taken a logical, positive approach to baseball that will help the coach convey his ideas to his players, and that will make interesting and informative reading for anyone who enjoys the sport. Novel in its approach, Buck Lai's extremely readable book is indeed a worthwhile addition to baseball's growing library.

Fresco Thompson
Vice President,
Brooklyn Dodgers

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1

WHAT MAKES A BIG LEAGUER?

THERE HAVE BEEN MANY HEATED DISCUSSIONS AS TO WHICH position is the most important in the game of baseball. The general consensus of opinion is that a good pitcher is the main factor for a winning team. But every position is important, as are all phases of the game—hitting, fielding, throwing, and running. A weakness in a team or player often permits the opposition to win the game. Unearned runs count as much as earned runs, and a hump-backed liner that falls safe looks the same as a smoking line-drive base hit in the box score, even though such a hit may be caused by a fielder getting a poor jump on the ball as it comes off the bat, or by lack of speed on the part of a defensive player.

There are two phases of the game that cannot be improved to any degree once a player has reached maturity: *throwing* and *running*. By *throwing* we do not mean pitching, and by *running* we mean sheer speed—not baserunning. A pitcher's speed may be increased some slight degree by correct grip on the ball or

proper follow-through, and a player's baserunning improved by getting the jump on the pitcher and making proper turns on the bases, but more of this later.

A player is either blessed with a strong arm and a fast pair of legs or he isn't. If he doesn't have these assets, he may be able to compensate for them by playing a position where such weaknesses are not so glaring. For example, a slow runner may become a catcher, a player with a poor arm, a first baseman; or one may be so outstanding in other departments of the game that his weaknesses will be overlooked. Many sluggers are slow afoot or have poor arms, but their hitting makes them successful players. They knock in more runs than they give away.

Fielding and hitting can be improved by practice and proper instruction. The finer points of a player's game will improve with experience and practice, practice, and more practice. It is important to practice correctly; many players go out on the field and perform a play incorrectly over and over again, because they do not know how to do it the right way or are too lazy to do it in the correct manner. Baseball is not a lazy man's game, and anyone who thinks it is should not venture on the playing field—better for him to stay home and listen to the radio or watch television while lounging on the sofa, daydreaming of his big league skills.

A player should hustle every second he is on the field. Granted that hustle is not worth much without ability, still, ability plus hustle is far superior to ability without hustle. HUSTLE! This does not mean that one needs to be a chatterbox, particularly if he is an outfielder, but he should put out physically one hundred per cent all of the time. There are numerous small things a player can do on the diamond which will help his team. Many times, the hitter on deck does nothing to help the baserunner coming home after the batter hits the ball. It is a simple matter to run over and take the bat out of the base path so the runner will not injure himself if he has to slide. The next hitter also should act as a coach at home plate.

The runner has his back to the play and does not know if it is necessary to slide or whether he can come in standing up. Maybe the throw has been cut off and there is no play at the plate. The only way the runner knows what to do is through some signal given by the next hitter. Many players have been hurt by unnecessary slides, so the man on deck should help the runner all he can; it's very possible that he may find himself in a similar situation later in the ball game.

It is impossible to evaluate hustle, individually or collectively, but any team that ever achieved fame hustled, and many clubs that just missed the boat, although loaded with talent, failed because of lack of hustle. If a team hustles, it will have good morale, which is an important factor for a winning combination. Players on the same club may have conflicting personalities and not be close friends, but if a man puts out to the best of his ability, he gains the respect of his teammates and also is held in high esteem by his opponents. *There is nothing that prevents a player from hustling except the player himself!* Spirit and fight come from within, and if an individual lacks these qualities, there is little that anyone else can do about it. A manager cannot give a pep talk every game, and if it takes such an artifice to stimulate a so-called competitor, it is better to dispose of that ballplayer. No one likes to ride herd on a player and continually prod him to get results. Such procedure is distasteful to both parties and often causes friction on a ball club, involving other members of the team.

If it were possible to take two players with equal ability—one a star performer, the other a mediocre player—and find out what accounted for the difference in the degree of their success, it probably would be one or more of the factors we are about to discuss.

It is difficult to analyze the various qualities (other than physical ones) of a ballplayer, because they are all integrated to form a single personality. But, there are certain character-

istics that are found in the superior performer. They include the four A's—*aggressiveness*, *alertness*, *ambition*, and *attitude*.

The good player is not afraid of getting hurt; he is aware of the risk involved in certain plays, but is not in a defensive frame of mind.

He takes advantage of every opening that presents itself, and is always anticipating what may happen—what to do if the ball is hit to him, the speed of the baserunner, the score and situation of the game, the possibility of a bunt, and so forth.

The improving player is not satisfied with his present ability and seeks to become more skillful in the various skills of the game: hitting, fielding, bunting, sliding, stealing, making the double play, getting the jump on fly balls, control, covering first, shifting, blocking the plate, knowing the strike zone, hitting behind the runner, and so on. Success is achieved by one's desire to surpass mere mediocrity.

The desire to play, not being content merely to put on a uniform and sit on the bench, denotes a good competitor. If the game is worth playing at all, it is worth playing to the best of one's ability. Play the game to the fullest, but be able to take victory and defeat in stride.

It takes courage to play any sport, and baseball is no exception. The flashing spike, the speeding ball, the dazzling slide, and other phases of the game require daring and prowess, which are qualities possessed by the better player.

Baseball is a team game, and it takes *cooperation* to win ball games. This does not mean team play only, but cooperation between player and management also. The player must have a desire to learn and be able to take instruction from his coach. Whenever a player feels that he knows all there is to know about this game of baseball, he is in trouble. No matter what his age or experience, he never should think he knows it all, for this will result in a rude awakening one fine day.

An illustration of this is the story about the "pheenom" who knows all there is to know about the game and can perform any

skill better than everyone else. He can play any position on the team, and is so ambidextrous he can pitch with either hand and bat from either side of the plate. In the final game of the World Series, with each team having won three games and needing this game to become champions of the world, he is locked in a pitching duel with the ace of the opposing team—but let him tell it. . . .

"I really got my stuff today—my fast ball is a blue dart and my curve ball snaps like a whip. The old knuckler is doin' the dipsy-do, but I'm afraid to throw it 'cause the punk catcher can't handle it. The only reason my club is in the Series is that I win 45 games single-handed and save another 26 in relief. The manager don't know nothin' and the rest of the players on the team are a bunch of bums. They can't field, hit, or run, and are a bunch of has-beens or young whippersnappers. If I don't have two rubbers arms, hit .654 right-handed and .457 left-handed (a bad year), we wind up in the cellar. Think the management appreciates me? No! What a cheap organization—I'm only getting $150,000 per. Those dopey sportswriters don't even know what the score is before the game starts and form a clique 'gainst me. They don't even vote me the most valuable player on the team, give me a pannin', and say I'm hard to handle. Me? Why I'm the biggest drawin' card in the history of the game, and always willin' to co-op with anybody, anybody! Man, those guys don't know what they're writin' about. Wotta bunch of jerks.

"Well, anyway, to get back to my story, nobody on my miserable club gets anything that resembles a hit, 'cept me. The first time up (I'm battin' left-handed 'cause the lucky stiff pitchin' 'gainst me is a righty) I belt one over the right field wall. Don't get too much wood on the ball, only smack it about 485 feet on the fly—it don't go into Bedford Avenue, it winds up on Nostrand, plumb over the gas station and houses. It finally lands on a sanitation truck and is goin' yet. Some character that

lives down near the dump'll get it for a souvenir; he'll probably want me to autograph it. Well, such is fame!

"My infield is really putrid. They kick the ball around and throw it away, and give the other team back the run I went and got. The opposin' hitters ain't got a chance 'gainst me. I pitch left-handed to the left-handed hitters and righty to the right-handed guys. I got a two-way glove—got two thumbs on it. I just switch it back and forth—saves time.

"The doggone chucker pitchin' against me is a smarty pants and walks me the next couple of times up. He's really ascared of me and don't give me nothin' good to hit. Well, we finally get into the ninth inning tied, 1–1, and I got the only hit in the ball game. I retire the three hitters that face me, strike 'em out, two swingin' and one with the bat on his shoulder. The poor chump never even saw the pitch! Neither did the catcher—the ball hits him in the chest and bounces out toward the mound. I'm on it like a tiger and throw the joker out at first base. Lucky thing the ump is usin' his good eye, otherwise nobody woulda seen the pitch.

"It looks like the ball game is goin' into extry innings 'cause the first two guys on our team get out and I come up to the plate. I'm battin' clean-up, the only smart move the manager ever made. The natural thing for the opposition to do is to walk me. Our fifth hitter is the cream puff type and ain't got the ball outa the infield the whole series.

"Well sonny, this opposin' hurler ain't nobody's dummy—the first pitch he throws to me goes behind my back. I don't have a chance in the world of hittin' the ball. But *me*, I'm a pretty smart cookie and I figger this is where the rest of the pitches will be, 'cause the last time I reached out and hit one out of the lot in left field. It curved foul at the last second—you shoulda heard the crowd roar. A bunch of stupes, don't even know a foul ball when they see one.

"The next pitch this so-called pitcher throws I'm ready for. Since I'm in the left-hander's battin' box and figger the pitch

will go behind me, I turn around to bat right-handed. No danger of crossing the plate and bein' called out. I know all the rules—can quote 'em backwards and forwards—all I do is to shift my position in my own battin' box. I'm loose as a goose, and everythin' is perfectly legal. I'm a smart cookie, S-M-A-R-T. I times this ball just right and gets all my power behind it. Off it goes into the wild blue yonder, completely over the left field stands! First time anythin' like that has been done since the park was built. That crazy crowd really goes crazy *this* time.

"I trots around the bases expectin' to get a great big welcome at home—this club ain't won a World Series before—but guess what happens. In all the confusion I forget I'm swingin' right-handed, and I circle the bases the wrong way and UNTIE the score. We lose, 1–0, and those fans are so sore I'm lucky to get outa town. Nobody will handle me next year and I wind up in the minors. Toughest game I ever lost!"

So much for our fallen hero, who was blessed with ability but never assumed his responsibility to the game. He lacked most of the finer traits of the athlete, and cooperation was one of them. *Cooperation* includes *loyalty;* loyalty to the team and the organization it represents. A baseball player will probably play on many teams, whether he is an amateur or professional. As his age and skill increase, he will move up the ladder—Little League, Little Bigger League, American Legion, high school, sandlot, college, semi-pro, and maybe professional baseball. If he comes this far or stops along the way, he will have played on many teams. In professional ball he will most likely start in Class D, and may run the gamut through Class C, B, A, AA, AAA and reach the major leagues. This necessitates a change of allegiance from one team to another and often requires a player to perform against former teammates and friends. He is obligated to do his darndest to win for the team which he now represents.

This brings us to another factor which separates the men from the boys—*desire to win.* The only time a player can console himself with defeat is after he has played his best and lost.

Everyone knows that a person cannot win all the time, but he can sure try!

In order to be in the best possible physical condition to play winning ball, a player must maintain good habits. These habits may change slightly as he matures and requires less sleep, as changes are made in diet, and as he is able, gradually, to assume responsibility for his own health. Here again we run into the same situation as we did in hustle; no one can prevent a player from forming good habits, and from keeping them, but himself. The management doesn't like to establish a curfew and act as a policeman, but some players are their own worst enemies and must be saved from themselves. A boy grows up quickly nowadays, and he should know right from wrong while still in school. It is not a question of age, but of ability to assume responsibility, and this varies with the individual.

Sometimes it is ignorance that causes a player to break training or harm himself as far as baseball is concerned. Excessive swimming while playing baseball is forbidden by most coaches. Although swimming is recognized by many as the most healthful sport, it develops a different set of muscles than those used in baseball, and there is also the danger of becoming sunburned and being laid up for a few days. Often a player hurts his chances of making a career of organized ball by being too industrious while training. A good baseball player cannot be "muscle bound," and too much weight lifting and football will do just that. It is necessary to develop strong, supple muscles, and calisthenics, running, skipping rope, medicine ball, and activities of this sort will help. It is not necessary to eliminate other sports from one's life, and it is heartily recommended that a boy develop some degree of skill in many athletic activities.

Another trait that is important in baseball, as it is in everything else, is *honesty*. No one loves an alibi artist or clubhouse lawyer. The former has an excuse for every mistake he makes, and the latter causes dissension on the team by criticizing his teammates, the coaches, manager, the umpire, and everyone but

himself. He is never satisfied with the equipment, dressing facilities, condition of the field, or the fans, and even picks on the bat boy. The successful player must be honest with himself and stand or fall on his own merit.

An industrious player is a good player. There's a lot of truth in that old saying, "Practice makes perfect." One will never become a perfect player, never making an error, either of omission or commission; that is too much to expect of any human being, but one's degree of proficiency will increase the more he practices.

In order to guard against "errors of omission," it is very important for the player to have a thorough knowledge of the game that he is playing. Many good players are not as familiar with the rules as they should be—what makes a balk, what the ruling is if the ball hits an umpire, what happens when a player bats out of turn. These and similar situations often baffle the player and fan, and sometimes even the umpire. *Know the game!*

Perseverance and *poise* are other attributes of the good ballplayer. A player who recognizes his weakness, does not worry about it, but practices until he has corrected it, is one that must succeed. Poise is a quiet confidence in one's ability, and it comes with experience.

Put all these ingredients together, aggressiveness, alertness, ambition, attitude, courage, cooperation, loyalty, desire to win, good habits, hustle, industry, knowledge of the game, perseverance and poise, stir gently, add some ability, sprinkle with good coaching, a dash of luck, and there's a major league baseball player!

2

BATTING

THE MOST POPULAR PART OF BASEBALL IS HITTING. EVERYONE loves to swing at that little white ball, particularly when a "cousin" is pitching. There's a natural urge to grab a bat and try to hit that piece of horsehide out of sight. This is probably a desire man has had from the time his ancestors first picked up a club. "Gi'me that bat and watch me hit that ball!"

There's more to hitting than grabbing a bat, striding to the plate, swinging, and trotting around the bases. Natural hitters are rare, batting is an art, and there are correct and incorrect ways to bat. Many young players imitate their favorite ballplayer's batting stance and are amazed that they cannot hit the ball the way the stars do. Hitting entails a lot more than stance, although proper stance is important.

There is no one way to hit—rarely do two good hitters do everything the same. But there are certain principles that most of them follow, and these will be described here. It is true also that there have been many unorthodox hitters who were very successful in major league baseball. No attempt will be made to explain the *why* and *wherefore* of their high batting averages.

Why tamper with success? Most coaches do not attempt to change a good hitter's batting form. The unusual technique he employs is probably right for him. While this hitter may improve if he follows the standard batting procedure, there is also the possibility that his batting will become poorer. If he can alter his batting form to comply with the popular belief of what is correct, and then is able to revert back to his old way of batting if not successful, so much the better.

It is impossible to analyze each player's batting technique and correct his batting faults in a book. Therefore, we should keep in mind that this material is for the normal hitter. Occasionally a ballplayer will successfully violate some principle of baseball, whether it be in the hitting, pitching, or fielding phase of the game. It is important to be aware of individual differences, but in order to be practical in explaining the proper way to perform a skill, it is necessary to deal in generalities. Common faults, and how to correct them, will be dealt with quite extensively, but it is not our purpose to explain the batting success of high-stepping Mel Ott, bucket-footing Al Simmons, open-stance Wally Moses, hitching Bob Elliott, jumping Billy Cox, awkward-stance Gil McDougald, or other unorthodox hitters.

Bat Selection

The first thing a batter should do is select a bat of the proper weight, length, and shape. Naturally this varies with the individual. Sometimes players use several models, swinging a lighter bat when facing a fast ball pitcher, or during hot weather when they feel they may not be up to par physically. A switch in bats may be made for psychological reasons; a player may believe he can shake a slump if he changes bats.

Proper Grip

Proper batting form is important. The player should be relaxed at the plate, but still ready to hit that ball. *No one should*

be so relaxed that the pitcher will knock the bat out of his hands, nor so tense that he will squeeze the bat handle out of shape.

When a hitter steps into that batter's box, he should be *ready* to hit. This means that he should have the proper grip on the bat. No hitter holds the bat cross-handed, and very few keep

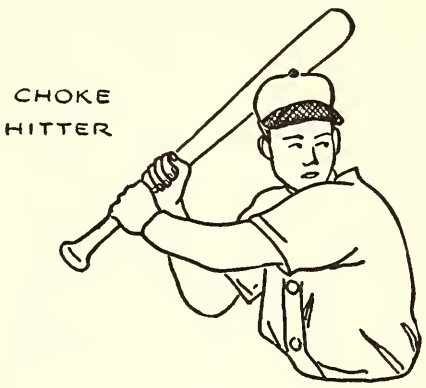
The left-handed hitter follows this procedure to get the proper grip on the bat.

their hands apart. It's impossible to get good power with these two types of grips. Spreading the hands apart may aid the batter in placing the ball to some slight degree and may have been popular in the past, but it is not the proper grip to use now. *Keep those hands together!*

The choke hitter is one who usually sprays hits to all fields. By grasping the bat several inches from the end, he is cutting down on his leverage and thus decreasing his power; this type of hitter just tries to meet the ball, and usually hits the ball where it is pitched. For example, when a pitch is inside, a right-handed batter pulls it to left field, and when it is outside, he hits to right field. But his hands are still close together. He will not get as much distance as the hitter who holds the bat at the end of the handle, but he may have a higher batting average. A batter is a choke hitter by choice; if he wants to grasp the bat at the end, all he has to do is select a shorter, lighter model.

In order to acquire the correct grip on a bat, the *left-handed*

hitter should shake hands with the bat. This means he extends his right hand and grips the bat near the base of the handle. The label on the bat should be facing up. This helps eliminate bat breakage. No one likes to swing a bat while wondering if it will break or sting his hands when contact with the ball is made. There is less chance of this happening if the grain (label) of the bat is held up, facing the sky. When the left-handed batter is holding the bat in his right hand, he then grips it with his left hand, placing it so that the small finger on the left hand touches the index finger of the right hand. Then he shifts his *left hand* so that the second row of knuckles of each hand are in a straight line, or almost a straight line. This grip will enable him to hit the ball harder, because it provides him with the maximum power of each arm.

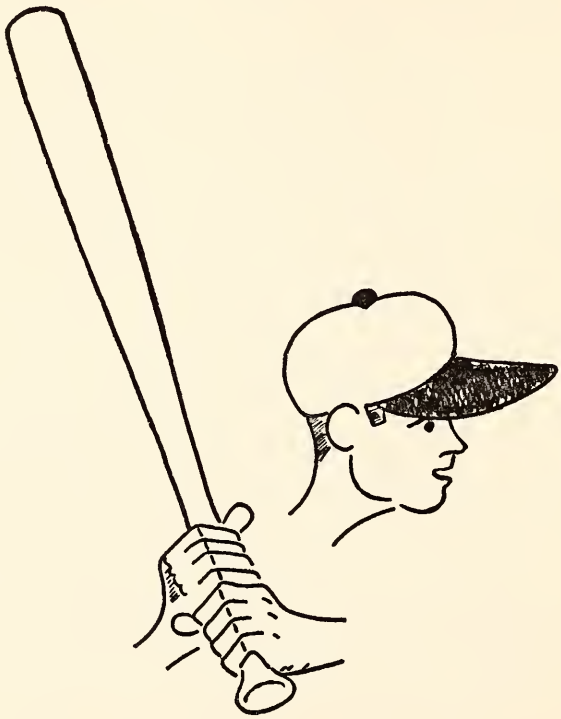


The choke hitter slides both hands up on the bat handle.

The right arm is pulling the bat while the left arm is pushing it toward the ball. Many batters, unthinkingly or naturally, line up either the third or the second set of knuckles on one hand with the third set on another, and this cuts down on their power, because the left hand—the back hand for left-handed hitters—does not generate maximum power but merely follows the front hand as a sort of hitchhiker. The left hand in this position also has a tendency to swing the bat up, and may cause the batter to be an uppercutter; this results in a lot of fly balls or pop-ups instead of line drives.

The hitter should remember that the second set of knuckles on each hand does not have to be in an exact straight line, as this may be too uncomfortable a position, but these knuckles should be in close alignment. This is not a complicated grip and will soon become second nature to the batter.

To assume the proper grip for a *right-handed* hitter, shake hands with the bat left-handed and carry on from there, shifting the right hand so that the second set of knuckles of each hand



In the proper grip the second row of knuckles on each hand should be almost in line.

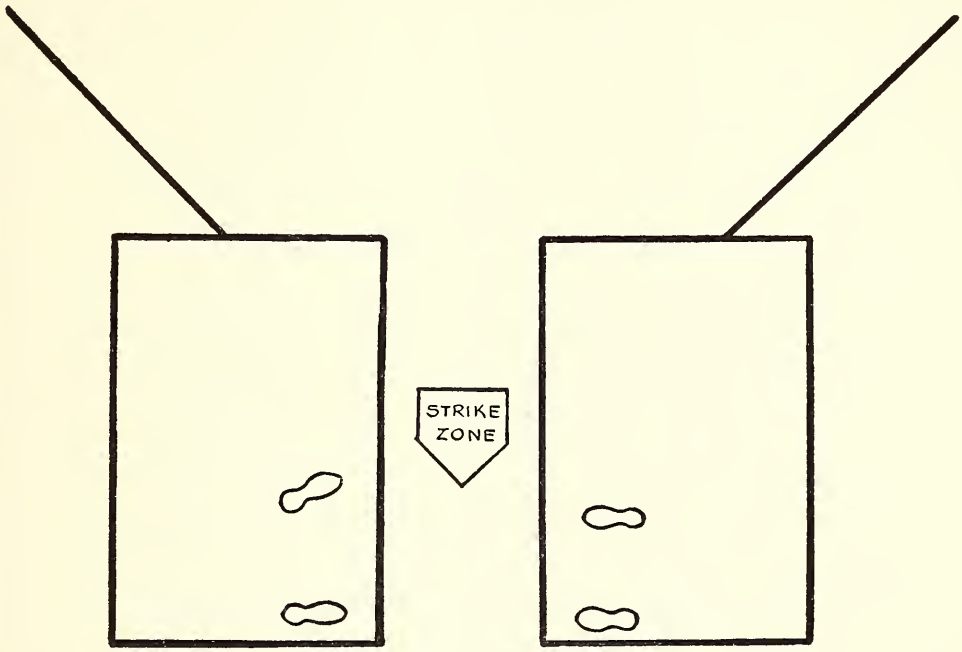
are in close alignment with one another. This is a very minute phase of hitting that is sometimes overlooked because most people think that all a batter does is grab a bat; they do not realize that the correct grip on a baseball bat is just as important as the correct grip on a golf club.

Position in the Batter's Box

The batting box is 4 feet wide and 6 feet long. This gives the batter a large area in which to place his feet. Where should the batter stand in relationship to home plate? This will depend on

several factors, and the player may not always stand in the same place.

First of all, the batter wants to swing at strikes, and strikes only. He does not want to swing at bad balls, except on rare



In order to hit the ball in the strike zone and in front of the body, stand in the back half of the batter's box.

occasions when it is necessary to protect the baserunner; he wants to hit balls that come between his arm pits and his knees and are over the plate, which is 17 inches wide. For maximum power, the bat should meet the ball ahead of the hitter's body. This means that the hitter should stand fairly deep in the box, behind home plate. He wants to hit the ball as it comes over the plate, and he wants to hit the ball in front of him. If he stands even with (alongside) the plate, it will be necessary to swing at balls in front of the plate so that the bat will meet the ball ahead of the player's body. Thus, the batter is swinging at balls before they come over the plate, and some of these pitches, especially curves, screwballs, and knucklers, would be balls by the time

they reached home plate. On the other hand, a pitch that the hitter lets go by because it is outside or inside before it reaches the plate may eventually cross the plate and result in a called strike.

Standing well back in the batter's box also gives the hitter a fraction of a second longer to get around on his swing on a fast ball. This type of pitch is the one the batter has to be ready for at all times. If he is not, the ball will just whiz by him before he can do anything about it. He should expect the fast ball and be able to adjust himself to the other types of pitches.

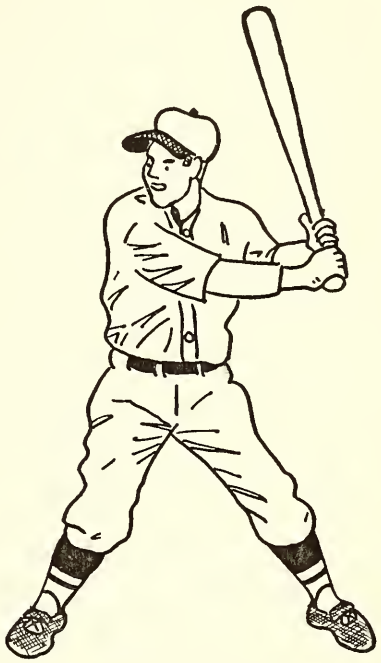
If he is facing a pitcher who is a curve ball artist, or one who specializes in the knuckle ball, or "junk," the hitter may change his stance by moving up in the batter's box. In other words, if a pitcher doesn't have a good fast ball, the batter may move closer to him. This sometimes enables him to hit the curve ball before it breaks, and other pitches before they zigzag or dip.

There is no set rule for the correct position of the batter's feet, although they are usually at right angles to the pitcher. Some hitters have the front foot facing the pitcher, while keeping the back one at right angles to him. Other batters point their feet at an angle (60, 45, 30 degrees, etc.) toward the pitcher. A batter who does this to such an exaggerated degree that he is practically facing the pitcher is said to have an open stance. Those who adopt such a stance normally do not have good power, but, as mentioned previously, there are always exceptions to the rule. Some hitters go to the other extreme and have their feet facing the catcher, while they peer over their shoulder at the pitcher. This type of hitter is usually a late swinger and consequently an opposite-field hitter.

Position of the Feet

When a player steps into the batter's box, the first thing he does is adjust his feet. Therefore, in describing the proper batting position, we will start at the feet and work up. The

weight of the hitter should be distributed equally on both feet. Sometimes a batter will stand flatfooted, with his weight on his heels, while awaiting a pitch. This is incorrect; the weight should be distributed throughout the entire foot, but the greater part should be on the front of the foot. The feet should be comfortably apart, and a stride of approximately 10 to 12 inches should be taken when the batter steps to meet the ball. Some players take too big a stride (overstride) and thereby fail to maintain proper balance. The good batter steps *to* hit the ball; he does not step *and* hit the ball. Few good hitters take a long stride, although there have been outstanding exceptions. An overstrider usually finds it difficult to hit breaking stuff (curved balls) or change of pace pitches. His weight has shifted to the front foot too quickly, and he has lost much of his power; the best he can hope to do is to just meet the ball and dump it over the head of some infielder.



The swing is started with each pitch, the batter holding back if the pitch is a ball.

The good hitter normally does not lift his rear foot off the ground. The heel of the rear foot comes up, but the front of the foot remains in contact with the ground. This enables the batter to stay anchored while swinging and permits him to get greater power in his swing.

Another foot fault occurs when the batter strides to the same spot every time, no matter where the ball is pitched. The player should try to hit the ball where it is pitched; if it is over the inside corner, he should try to pull the ball—if it is over the outside of the plate, he should attempt to hit it to the opposite field.

Such a procedure will prevent the defense from shifting too much on the batter, as it will if he continually hits to the same field, and add points to his batting average.

The batter who continually "steps in the bucket" is not only stepping in the same spot on every pitch, but he will not hit the pitch over the outer half of the plate. To compensate for this, some "bucketfooters" crowd the plate so they can protect all of it. Occasionally they slice a ball to the opposite field, but usually without much power. It has been said that the bucketfooter is a timid type of hitter. This is not always true. One could cite several stars who played in the major leagues who were in the bucketfoot classification. However, this type of hitter is becoming extinct, because it is practically impossible to step down the baseline continually and hit the ball with any consistency or power.

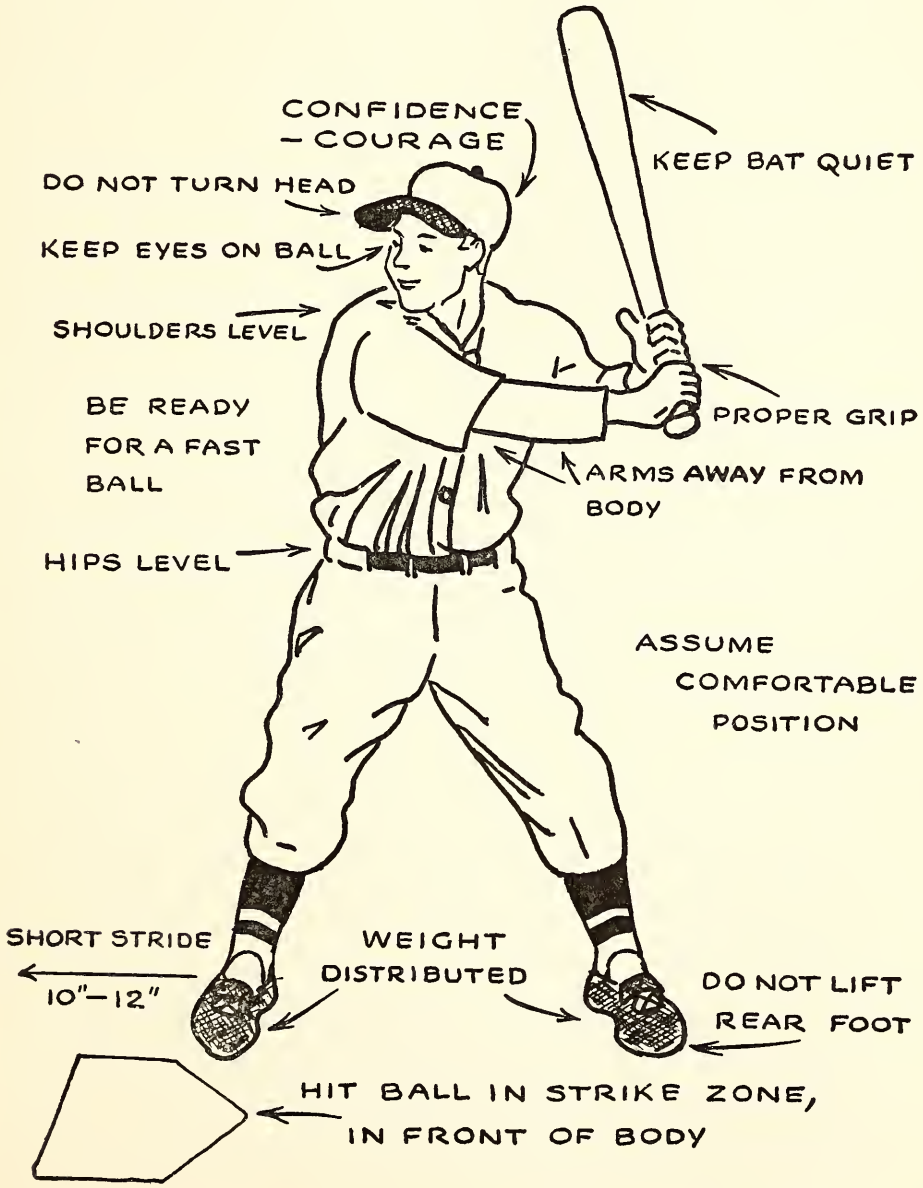
The Hips

So much for the lower part of a hitter's body. Now let's consider the hips. The hips should be on a plane level with the ground. This helps prevent uppercutting or constantly hitting the ball into the dirt (grounders). As the batter swings, the hips should turn in the direction the bat is going, until they are locked by the position of the front leg. Many players do not make full use of their hips or their shoulders, using the shoulders only as a prop for the bat. By snapping the hips toward the pitcher and using the shoulders, arms, and wrists correctly, a batter generates maximum power. The rear hip (farthest from the pitcher) is the one that gives the most power, but both hips are important in the swing.

The Shoulders

The shoulders also should be kept on a plane level with the ground for the same reasons as the hips. A batter who raises his front shoulder is usually an uppercutter; he swings up at the

ball. A batter who drops his front shoulder may be either a ground-ball hitter or an uppercutter. He may swing down at the ball, hitting it into the dirt, or he may have a tendency to swing the bat in a vertical arc, making contact with the ball on the upward swing, producing a pop fly.



The correct position for a batter at home plate.

The Arms

The arms should be kept away from the body. This means the upper part of the arm, shoulder to elbow, as well as the lower part of the arm, elbow to wrist. A batter should get as much leverage as he can. In order to do this, he tries to swing the bat in as big a horizontal arc as possible. Of course this does not mean that the front arm (closest to the pitcher) is in a straight line, from shoulder back to bat—it is slightly bent, permitting the batter to be comfortable. The arms in this position, away from the body, allow for freedom of movement. If the player attempts to swing the bat while his elbows are touching his chest, he will see the advantage of having his arms away from the body. All good hitters know that the elbows should be out, away from the body.

The "Quiet" Bat

Preliminary to his swing, a batter may do several things incorrectly. He may be a bat-waver, keeping the bat in motion while awaiting the pitch. The bat should be kept still. The good hitter has a "quiet" bat. His bat is motionless as the ball is approaching the plate; he is ready to hit the pitch if it is in the strike zone.

The "Hitch"

The common fault found in many hitters is the "hitch." Many hitters who reach the top of their profession have this fault; they would be better hitters if they could eliminate the hitch. A hitch occurs when the batter brings the bat forward slightly and then returns it to its original position a split second before he swings. This slight movement disrupts a batter's timing, because instead of timing just his swing, he has to time his hitch *plus* his swing to the pitch, which may come at any speed. Batting should be as simple as possible; a hitch complicates the problem of hitting the ball and makes it more difficult.

The faults that are being discussed here are usually of such a nature that a player does not know he is making them. If he knew what he was doing wrong, he would try to correct it immediately, for he wants to become as good a baseball player as he possibly can. Most players do not realize they are hitching until it is called to their attention by someone interested in their improvement. Sometimes a player corrects his hitch, only to resume this bad habit a few days later.

To cure a hitch in your swing, raise the elbow shoulder high and lock the arm and shoulder. This method may even be used during a game.

There are at least two ways that a hitch can be corrected. The easiest way is to have the batter assume his natural stance and then raise his rear elbow as high as he can while keeping his shoulders level. In this position his rear arm is locked at the shoulder and elbow joints, and he cannot hitch unless he does so by using his entire body. Such a batting position continues to give freedom of movement while making it almost impossible to hitch.

Another way to correct a hitch is to have the batter take his natural stance and then have him cock his wrists slightly so that the fat end of the bat rests alongside (*not* on top of) his rear shoulder. Every time the player hitches he feels the bat rub his shoulder; if the bat does not rub his shoulder, he is not hitching. Naturally, the batter does not hit this way in a game, for he would have trouble swinging the bat around fast enough to meet the ball in front of his body. He hits in batting practice with the bat touching his shoulder, and as soon as he feels he has corrected his hitch, he uncocks his wrists and brings the bat away from his shoulder, returning it to its natural position.

Another name for a severe hitch is *windup*. This type of ma-

neuver is all right to use if one is hitting a stationary object, as in swinging a huge hammer in an attempt to ring the bell and win a cigar, but there is no place for it in baseball. Even when a player is practicing on the batting tee he should be careful not to hitch or wind up, for he may develop a bad habit which will stay with him when he is playing a game. To play correctly, it is important to practice correctly.

In batting practice, you can use this method to cure a hitch.

The Head

For a good hitter, the head plays a most important part. There are numerous head faults of which a batter must be aware, so that he may avoid them. One head fault can make the difference between a good hitter and a poor hitter.

First of all, *the batter must keep his eye on the ball at all times*. This means from the time he sees it in the pitcher's hand until it makes contact with the bat or he lets it go by him into the catcher's mitt. It is imperative that the batter see the ball as it approaches the plate. Many a hitter *thinks* he keeps his eyes on the ball as it nears him, but at the moment he starts his swing—when the ball is closest to him, when the ball is going to take off, dip, hook, flutter, or curve—he inadvertently turns his head and loses sight of the ball. Why? Because he is trying to get as much power as possible in his swing and unconsciously turns his head in the direction he is swinging the bat. This is stupid. It makes any meeting of the bat and ball purely accidental. If a person is going to drive a nail with a hammer, does he look at the nail he is going to hit? Certainly, and it is even more important when the object with which he wishes to make contact is a moving one. Does a marksman keep aiming at a bird in flight until he pulls the trigger? If he didn't, he would go home empty-handed.

And that's what a batter does when he turns his head, goes "four for 0." A successful hitter cannot be a head-turner. It may be impossible to see the ball actually make contact with the bat—this point will not be argued—but a hitter must keep his eyes on the ball at all times.

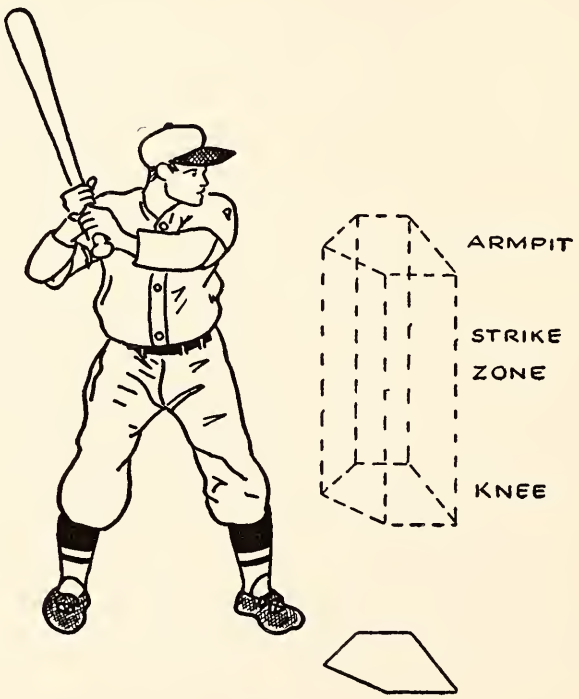
Another mistake a hitter makes is that of continually *guessing* what type of pitch the pitcher is going to throw. It is intelligent for the batter to know the count (number of balls and strikes) on him, the type of pitcher he is facing, his best pitch, and the situation of the ball game. He should know if the pitcher is trying to make him hit the ball into the dirt for a double play, the position of the defense, and everything that goes to make up a ball game; but *to guess on every pitch is foolish.* If the batter gets a pitch he is not expecting, he is thrown off balance and watches the pitch sail by for a called strike or taps it weakly to the infield. The hitter should be prepared for the fast ball; if he is expecting any other pitch, the fast ball will go by him before he can readjust himself to swing, and he will be caught looking. If the pitch is not a fast ball, the batter then can change his timing and hit the ball.

A characteristic of every good hitter, and one that may come from the heart instead of the head, is *courage. A player cannot be afraid of a pitched ball and expect to play baseball.* In order to become a successful hitter, he must go up to the plate with a desire to hit the ball, no matter who is pitching. The batter has to have confidence in his ability and determination—a word commonly used is *guts*—to become a successful hitter. A good hitter has to be aggressive, daring the pitcher to throw the ball over the plate; the defensive hitter, one who is surprised when he hits the ball well, is a poor hitter.

The Strike Zone

Although there have been good bad-ball hitters, everyone agrees that the batter should swing only at balls in the strike

zone, except in rare instances. If the baserunner is stealing, the batter may swing at the ball to make it as difficult as possible for the catcher to throw the runner out. Such a maneuver by the batter may temporarily block the catcher's vision of the runner and cause a slight delay in the throw. It is also more difficult to

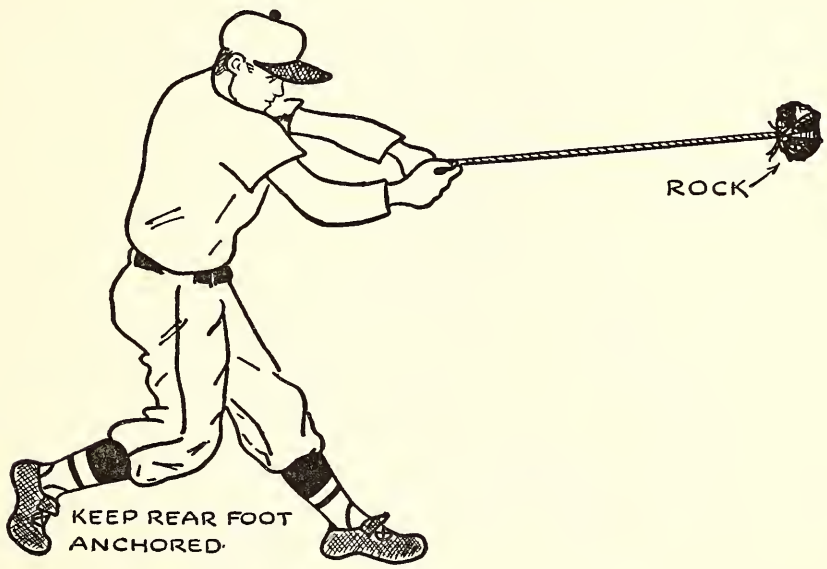


The strike zone is determined by the batter's armpits and knees. The ball is hit in front of the body.

catch a ball as a bat goes swishing by than when the batter just stands there with the bat on his shoulder. The batter has to go after a bad ball if the "suicide squeeze" is on, and he has to protect the baserunner. The same applies if the "hit-and-run" is being attempted. In general, however, he does not go after bad balls, for there is no percentage in it.

The strike zone is that parcel of atmosphere between the batter's knees and armpits extending vertically from home plate.

Naturally, the size of this zone varies with every hitter, depending upon his height and batting stance. If the pitcher fails to throw the ball through the strike zone and the batter does not swing, the umpire has to call such a pitch a *ball*. Four such pitches and the batter *walks*. The walk is a potent offensive weapon, more powerful than most people realize. There is no defense against a base on balls. Many young hitters look with

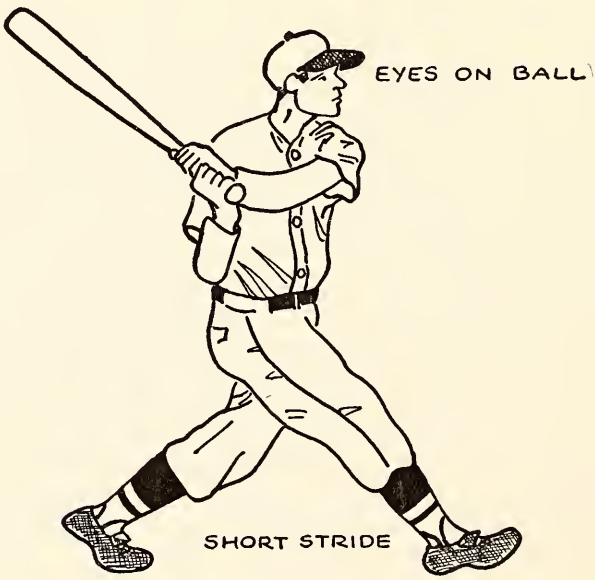


To swing correctly, imagine you are trying to hit the ball with a rock tied to the end of a rope.

disdain upon this method of reaching first base and would rather swing away, hoping to hit one out of the lot. If a batter does not learn the strike zone, he is cutting down on his effectiveness and hurting his team. There is no reason for him to make the pitcher's job easier. When the batter is up there at the plate, it is a personal duel between him and the pitcher. The batter wants to get on base, the pitcher's aim is to get him out. A run scored via a base on balls counts just as much as a home run. If the batter will swing only at strikes, he will increase his batting average, get more walks, and his team will win more games.

The Swing

The next important phase of hitting is developing a powerful swing. If a batter does not swing at the ball properly, he can do everything else correctly and still not have any power. Strength is important, but a player does not have to be exceptionally strong to be a good hitter. Many strong men never become good

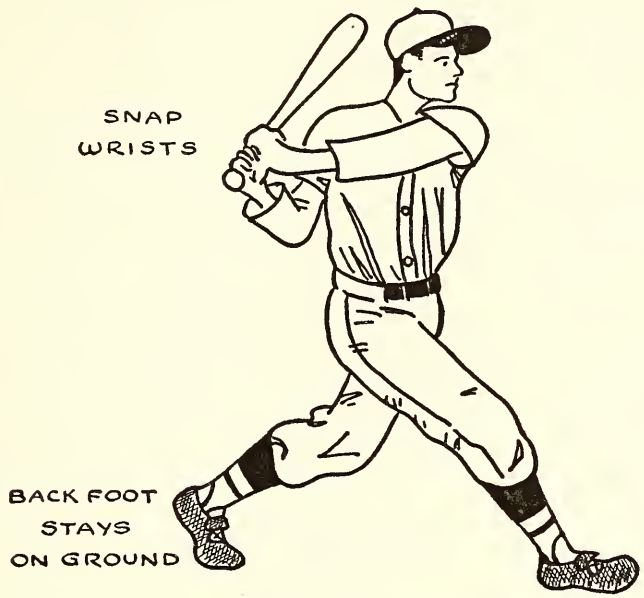


Nearing the completion of his swing, the batter's rear foot is still anchored and his wrists have snapped to put power into the swing.

hitters, either because they are muscle-bound, have poor timing, or do not swing the bat correctly. There are excellent hitters who have slender builds—strong, yes, but certainly not as strong as some of the players who cannot hit the ball half as far or half as often. *To get power, the batter must swing the bat correctly.*

Let's assume that the player goes up to the plate with a piece of rope approximately 36 inches long. One end of this rope is attached to a rock; the batter grasps the rope at the other end with both hands. As the ball comes to the plate, he tries to hit it with the rock. To do this he must keep the rope taut, and he

does this by snapping his wrists as he swings. If a hitter would use his bat in this manner, throwing the fat end of the bat at the ball, he would be getting maximum power. A batter has to follow through if he swings this way.



At the completion of the swing the batter's eyes are still on the ball, and he has taken a short stepping stride.

How To Hit the Change-Up

When the batter is prepared to hit the fast ball all the time and is starting his swing at the pitch, ready to hit the ball or to hold up his swing if the pitch is outside the strike zone, he may have difficulty hitting the change-up pitch. The change-up pitch is designed to throw the batter off balance. He is ready to hit the fast ball, his weight shifting forward, and then the change-up pitch slowly approaches the plate. If he has all his weight on his front foot, the player is off balance and has lost all his power. If he does hit the ball, the best he can do is to tap it weakly to some infielder.

When the batter starts his swing and then realizes a change-up

pitch is coming, he should try to wait as long as possible before swinging at the ball. To help him do this, he should try to hit the ball to the opposite field. That means a right-handed hitter swings as if he is trying to hit the ball to right field and a left-handed hitter tries to hit the ball to left field, even though the pitch may not be over the outside corner of the plate. By trying to hit the ball to the opposite field, the batter is timing the change-up pitch better. It is not important for the ball to go to the opposite field—it most likely will not—but the batter is getting some power behind such a swing. *By trying to hit to the opposite field, he is delaying his swing enough to hit the ball well.* This procedure also will help the right-handed hitter on the hit-and-run play.

The follow-through.

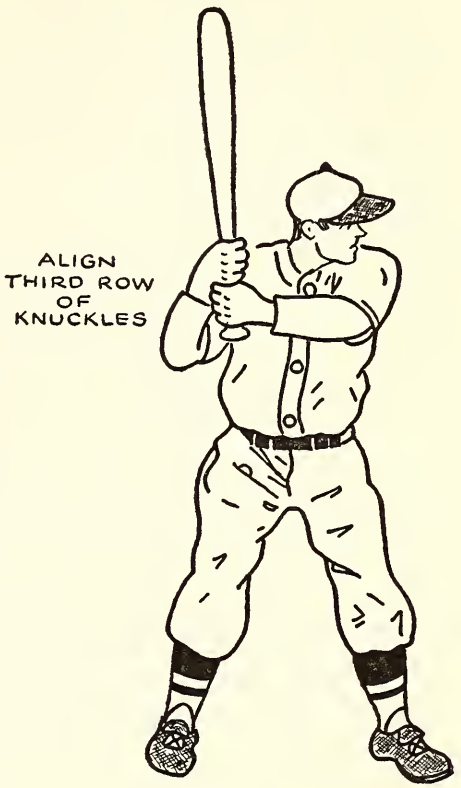
The Hit-and-Run

The purpose of the hit-and-run play is to advance the runner an extra base. This is one of the most cleverly executed plays in baseball, when done correctly, and is appreciated by all baseball fans. Its success depends upon the cooperation of the baserunner and the batter, but the latter is the key man.

Most hit-and-run situations occur with a runner on first base, although the play is used sometimes with a runner on second base or runners on first and second. The baserunner follows almost the same procedure as when he is attempting to steal a base. He gets his lead, and as soon as the pitcher releases the ball toward home plate, the runner takes off for the next base. He may not break quite as soon as he would for a steal, but otherwise his movements are the same as when stealing. It is im-

portant that the defense be unaware of the plans of the offense, or a pitch-out may result in the runner being cut down on the base path.

To make sure that the runner will advance, the batter tries to hit the ball behind his teammate on base. This means that the batter usually tries to hit the ball to right field. If he is successful in getting a base hit in this direction, the runner will make third base and possibly score. If the batter hits the ball on the ground to the infield, the runner will reach second base, and the result will be the same as a sacrifice. The dangers involved in this play are several. First, the batter may miss the ball and the runner will be thrown out attempting to advance. However if the runner gets a good start, he may steal the base, even though the hit-and-run doesn't work. Secondly, the batter may hit a line-drive that will be caught, and this is usually a sure-fire double play, as the runner has already committed himself and doesn't have time to return to his base. The runner must be alert to a fly ball or pop-up, so that he can hustle back to the bag.



One way to punch the ball into right field is to lock the wrists and line up the third row of knuckles on each hand.

Sometimes the infielders are drawn out of position by the runner breaking for the next base, and the batter hits through this vacated spot. On the other hand, the batter may hit a ball that normally would be a base hit but is caught by an infielder because he happens to be running out of position. An example of

Use the place hitting grip to punch the ball to right field.

this would be a right-handed hitter rapping a sharp ground ball just to the right of second base that is fielded by the second baseman because he happens to be covering the bag to take a throw from the catcher. The second baseman broke for the keystone sack as soon as the runner on first base made his intentions known. Usually the best time to use the hit-and-run is early in the ball game when your team is ahead or when there is a slow runner on first base, to prevent a double play. If the hit-and-run fails, it is the same as a runner failing to steal a bag, but if it is successful, it will upset the defense and may result in a run that otherwise would not be scored.

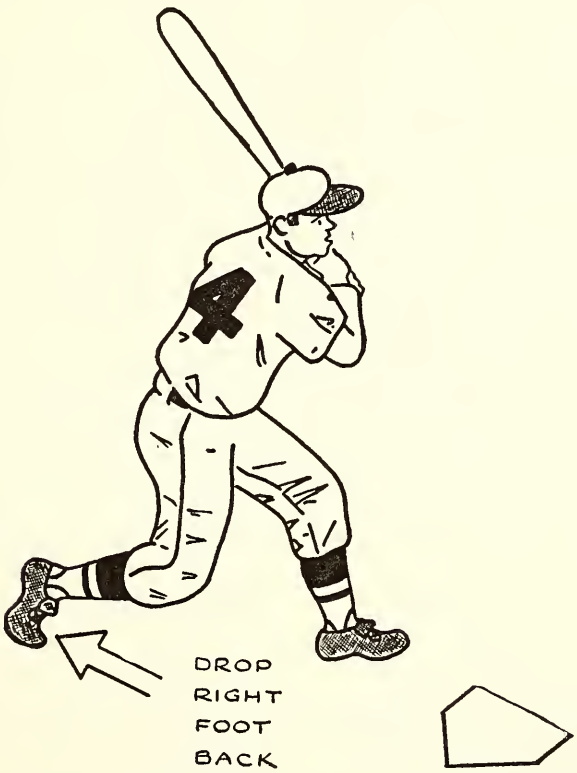
How To Hit Behind the Runner

With a runner on first base and the hit-and-run play on, any kind of a base hit, even a scratch single, will advance the runner to third base. A double usually will score a runner from first base if he is running with the pitch. A hard-hit ground ball directly at the second baseman often advances the runner from first to second base and prevents the double play, even though the batter is retired at first. Of course, the greatest danger to the offensive team is a line drive that is caught and turned into a double play. The runner has almost no chance to regain first base, particularly when the ball is caught by an infielder.

With a runner on second base and a ground ball hit to the right side of the diamond (behind him), the baserunner usually

advances to third base safely. If he attempts to go to third base on a ground ball hit to the left side of the infield (in front of him), his chances of being thrown out at the hot corner are greatly increased. *In a tight ball game where one run means victory, the advancement of a baserunner assumes great importance.* Therefore, it is necessary for the batter to learn to hit behind the runner. He should be able to hit to right field when the occasion demands it.

In trying to hit the ball to right field, the left-handed hitter has an easy job compared to the right-handed hitter. The "lefty"

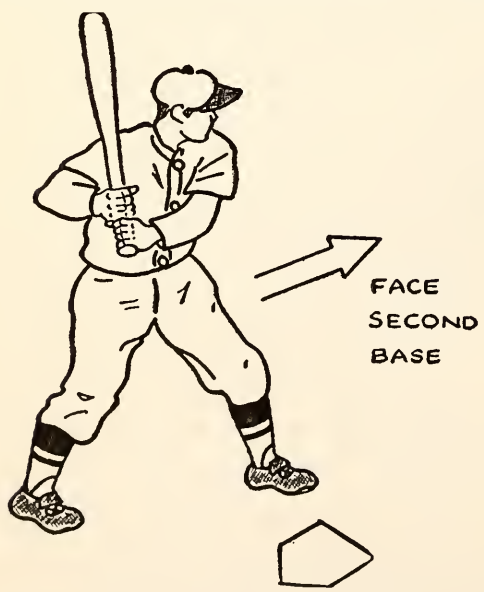


To hit behind the runner the batter changes his stance.

just tries to pull the ball and usually doesn't have to change his batting style. On the other hand, the right-handed hitter must punch the ball to the opposite field. This is rather difficult to do. Naturally, every ball hit to right field by a right-handed

hitter is not hit there deliberately. The batter may swing normally and hit the ball toward right field because it is pitched over the outside corner of the plate. This is good batting, for the batter should be able to hit to all fields. This keeps the defense from ganging up on the hitter and employing shifts, which often turn normal base hits into outs. *But, it is doubly difficult to hit to right field when the batter desires to do it, no matter where the ball is pitched.* Several methods of how to do this will be explained. These will affect only the right-handed hitter, although the left-hander can use these techniques to hit to left field. The hitter can try all these methods and select the one that suits him best.

To punch the ball to the opposite field, all the hitter has to do is to change his grip. In describing proper batting procedure, the hitter was told to snap his wrists, and the correct grip was explained also. When punching to right field, the hitter does not snap his wrists. Therefore, he "locks" his wrists by lining up the third set of knuckles on each hand. This curtails the swing and helps him punch the ball to right field.



To hit to the opposite field the batter assumes a normal stance but faces the second baseman.

There is another way for the hitter to change his grip to prevent him from snapping his wrists. All he has to do is to adopt the grip of the "place hitter." He does this simply by spreading his hands apart on the handle of the bat an inch or two. This is done by sliding the right hand up the bat toward the fat end while keeping the left hand still. This cuts down on the batter's power and gives him better bat control, which enables him to punch the ball to right field.

If the hitter finds that he cannot hit the ball to right field by changing his grip, he may change his stance at the plate. A player can hit to the opposite field by dropping his right foot back as the pitch comes to the plate. The foot does not move toward the catcher, but about six inches directly to the rear of the hitter, about a half step backward. This procedure makes the hitter face more toward right field, the direction in which he wants to hit, and it also delays his swing a split second, forcing him to swing late and making it easier to hit to right field.

There is no sure way of guaranteeing the hitter that he will be able to hit to the opposite field, but if all else fails, he may assume his regular stance in the batter's box and face the second baseman rather than the pitcher. This method also has the batter face in the direction he desires to hit, and all he has to do is to swing in his normal manner. His chances of hitting behind the runner have increased, even though he takes his normal cut at the ball. The batter can aim to hit the ball at the second baseman. In most instances, the ball will not go to the second baseman but will travel in that general direction. Of course, the one big disadvantage in using this method is that the alert catcher will notice the batter has changed his stance and guess his intention.

Types of Poor Hitters

The poor hitters can be placed in certain categories, because of the way they swing. They are: *slap hitter*, *sweep hitter*, *lunger*, *fall-away hitter*, *chop hitter*, *late swinger*, and *poor follow-through hitter*.

A *slap hitter* is one who pokes at the ball with his bat. He looks like he is swatting flies two-handed up there at home plate, and would have about as much success hitting them as he does hitting the baseball. This type of hitter doesn't have any power, and when he isn't busy waving at the ball he is hitting it to some

infielder or getting an occasional single. The slap hitter neglects to use his hips in his swing, using only the upper part of his body, and this incorrectly, to generate power.

The *sweep hitter* is another boy who does not hit the ball very far. This hitter puts his entire body behind his swing, but has little power, due to poor wrist action. He fails to snap his wrists or roll them and only gets slightly more power than the slap hitter. One can get some idea of the power that remains idle from failure to use the wrists correctly by picking up a bat and swinging it back and forth, keeping the wrists stiff (still) and the arms straight. Then, if he takes several swings and snaps the wrists as the bat makes its arc, the sound the bat makes going through the air is much more noticeable, denoting more power. "The air was shattered by the force of Casey's blow," says Ernest Thayer's baseball epic, *Casey at the Bat.*

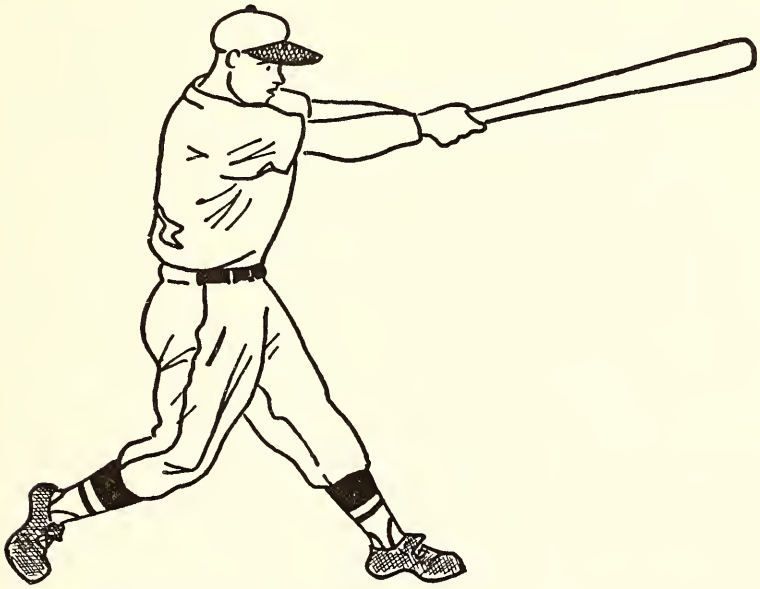
The *lunger* goes for the ball the way the fencer moves toward the opponent. The only difference is that the lunger has two hands on his weapon, and the fencer uses one. A hitter of this type is off balance and loses his power because of this. The upper part of his body moves forward farther than the lower part, and his head and torso are ahead of his front foot when he swings.

The *fall-away hitter* is somewhat like the hitter who buck-foots, except that his front foot does not go down the baseline. He is off balance when he swings, because his weight is back on his heels and the rear part of his body as he falls back from the plate. He has poor hip action and poor power.

The *chop hitter* resembles the woodsman cutting down a tree with an ax. This type of hitter has a downward swing and does not follow through the way he should. If he meets the ball squarely, it will have a tendency to go into the dirt. Poor follow-through curtails this hitter's power.

The *late swinger* is the hitter who consistently hits to the opposite field. This, of course, is because he does not get the bat around quickly enough. He may not be ready to hit the pitch,

or his reflexes may be a shade too slow as he sees the ball approaching the plate. The bat is not making contact with the ball far enough ahead of the body. The defense shifts on such a hitter, and he will be pitched to in a certain manner. The pitcher may keep the ball over the inside corner, figuring that



Throw the fat end of the bat at the ball.

the batter will hit the ball on the handle of his bat. This type of hitter loses considerable power, because no one has as much power hitting to the opposite field as he does when pulling the ball.

The batter with *poor follow-through* ceases to swing the bat as soon as it makes contact with the ball. He is only taking a half swing, similar to that of a hitter who starts to swing at the ball and makes up his mind too late to hold back, breaking his wrists enough to have a strike called by the umpire. Follow-through is important in any athletic activity, particularly batting. A hitter who fails to complete his swing cannot hope to have the power he would have with correct follow-through.

Summary

Some people say that the best way to teach an athlete how to do something is to use only the positive approach. This way he is being told only the correct method and not the various incorrect ways. Therefore, the athlete has to remember only one thing, the correct method, not several things—how to do it plus how *not* to do it.

This theory of teaching is all right if the coach is dealing with robots. If he is associated with human beings, they must be taught the proper way to perform and also made aware of faults and mistakes that may arise. Naturally, an athlete is not taught the incorrect way to perform an activity. In preceding pages, hitting faults were discussed; the proper way to hit is outlined in the following paragraphs:

A batter is taught how to hit rather than how *not* to hit. To become a good hitter, he should (remember we are dealing in generalities) assume a relaxed, comfortable position at the plate. His feet should be placed in position, so that when he swings, the bat will make contact with the ball in the strike zone, in front of the hitter's body. His weight should be equally distributed on both feet; he should take a short stride of about 10 to 12 inches, stepping in the direction he wants to hit the ball.

If he desires to pull the ball, the batter steps *away* from the plate; if he wants to hit to the opposite field, he steps *toward* the plate. In which direction he steps will depend largely on where the ball is pitched.

The batter's hips should be level and he "throws" his hips as he swings. His front hip turns backward as his rear hip goes forward in fluid, powerful motion. Good hip action helps generate batting power. Shoulders also should be kept level so that the batter will have a level swing and not consistently pop up or hit the ball in the dirt.

The batter should have the proper grip on the bat; his arms should be away from his body, and the bat should be kept quiet

until he is ready to swing. A good hitter likes to hit. He has confidence in his ability. He is courageous. A successful hitter knows the strike zone, and he follows the ball at all times; he does not turn his head as he swings. *He is ready to hit whenever he is in the batter's box.*

3

BUNTING

When a batter bunts, it is for the purpose of advancing a runner or an attempt to get a base hit. There has been much controversy on how to bunt, and a batter does not bunt the same way for each purpose. All successful bunters do not use the same technique, but the general procedure to be followed to become a skillful bunter will be described here.

Let's first consider the sacrifice bunt. In this bunt, the primary concern of the bunter is the advancement of the baserunner, whether it be from first to second base, second to third, or third to home. The batter realizes that he may have to make an out to accomplish this, but the importance of advancing the runner far exceeds that of making an out. Many young players are so interested in reaching base safely and getting a base hit that they neglect to bunt properly in their haste to get a good start to first base. This usually results in a force-out, a foul bunt, or a pop bunt. One cannot place too much stress on the purpose of the sacrifice bunt—*advance the runner, even though it has to be at the expense of the bunter.* The bunter is expendable!

A bunter should keep the following in mind when executing

the sacrifice. He should realize that he must bunt only good balls, balls that are in the strike zone, unless the *suicide squeeze play* is on. The suicide squeeze play takes place when the runner on third base starts for home plate as soon as the pitcher releases the ball to the batter. In this situation, the batter has to protect the runner and must make an attempt to bunt the ball, even though it may be out of the strike zone. When the *safety squeeze play* is on, the runner does not go until the ball is bunted, and the batter only bunts at good balls, balls in the strike zone. This also holds true when advancing a runner from first to second or second to third. The batter only bunts good balls.

The batter does not want the defense, particularly the pitcher, to know that he is going to bunt. Some of the success of the bunt can be attributed to unexpectedness on the part of the defense. Naturally, there are some situations where the defense expects a bunt, but they should not know the exact pitch that is to be bunted.

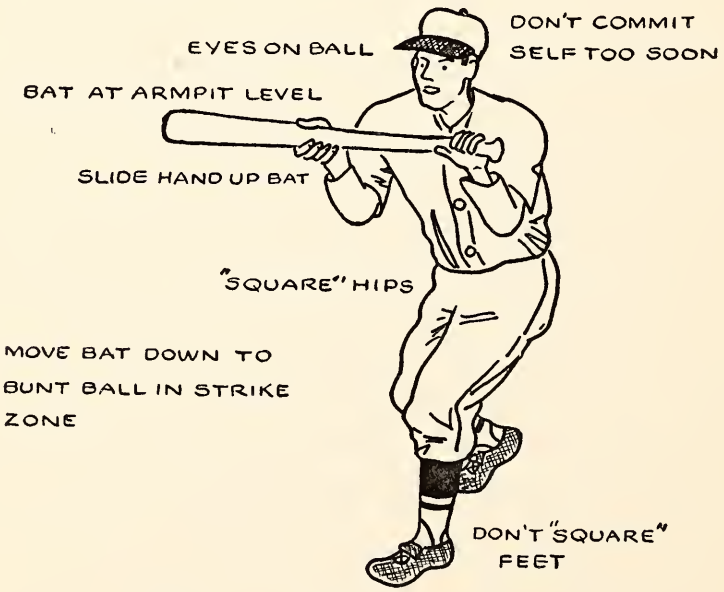
The pitcher does not want to walk the batter, but if he knows what the batter is going to do and when he is going to do it, he can pitch accordingly. Therefore, *the batter should not commit himself until the pitcher has made his delivery*. Many young players assume a bunting position while the pitcher still has the ball. This is incorrect. The batter assumes his bunting stance after it is too late for the pitcher to control the ball, after it is on its way to the plate.

The Sacrifice Bunt

Now, what is the correct stance for the sacrifice bunt? Some coaches teach their players to *square away* at home plate—this means the batter faces the pitcher. If a right-handed batter does this by bringing his right foot forward, he is apt to step on home plate and, of course, is automatically out. The same is true of a left-handed batter bringing his left foot forward. A right-handed

hitter might square away by dropping his left foot back while keeping his right foot in the same spot. The opposite would hold for a left-handed hitter. However, it is not necessary to square the feet to bunt the ball. A batter can swing his hips around and "square" them to the pitcher without lifting his feet off the ground. This position still gives him freedom of movement, is done more rapidly, and eliminates any danger of stepping on the plate.

The batter should bunt only balls in the strike zone (exception: suicide squeeze), and therefore he holds the bat at the top level of the strike zone as he squares his hips to the pitcher. The top of the strike zone is armpit high. Any ball that is higher than the bat, the hitter lets go by for a ball. Any ball that is below


EYES ON BALL
DON'T COMMIT SELF TOO SOON
BAT AT ARMPIT LEVEL
SLIDE HAND UP BAT
"SQUARE" HIPS
MOVE BAT DOWN TO BUNT BALL IN STRIKE ZONE
DON'T "SQUARE" FEET

The correct bunting position.

the bat and in the strike zone, the batter bunts by bringing the bat down to the ball. The bat is held practically parallel to the ground and is moved down by bending the knees and waist. Of course, *on any ball that is below the knees, the batter does not bunt.* The batter holds the bat at the top of the strike zone to help him determine which balls are too high, and because it

is easier to lower the bat than to raise it. If he held the bat waist high, he would have to raise or lower it. When he holds it high, he only has to lower it. Bunting at a ball above the strike zone or by raising the bat increases the possibility of a pop fly.

The batter must have control of the bat when he is bunting the ball. The bat is brought around so that it is practically parallel to the ground and the fat end is closer to the pitcher. The bat is brought to bunting position by keeping the left hand (right-hand hitter) near the end of the bat and sliding the right hand toward the fat end. The right hand goes up one-third to one-half of the bat. The ball is bunted on the fat end of the bat, not in the area between the hands. The bat is brought forward and then back slightly when contact with the ball is made. Do not push at the ball. The resistance of the bat to the ball should be made while the bat is coming back, because the batter is better able to adjust the bat to the speed of the ball than when pushing forward. The bat "gives" with the ball.

It is not necessary to grip the bat tightly when bunting, although it should be held firmly. The bat is sometimes held in such a position by the right hand that, when contact with the ball is made, it jumps back over the third row of knuckles into the V formed by the thumb and index finger. This guarantees "give" when the bat hits the ball. However, this procedure is not recommended to the average bunter. The bat should not be held in a stiff-armed position; the elbows should be bent slightly to allow the bat to "give." The batter attempts to bunt the ball in fair ground near the foul line, far enough from the plate so that the catcher will have difficulty fielding it. During practice, a circle can be drawn where the batter desires to bunt the ball, and the bunter's skill can be readily observed.

The Base-Hit Bunt

When bunting for a base hit, the batter must catch the defense by surprise. He cannot square his feet or his hips in the

same manner as when sacrificing, and he usually gives the ball greater impetus than when sacrificing. It is more difficult to become skillful at bunting for a base hit than it is to become adept at laying down a sacrifice. The technique for each hitter differs, depending upon which side of the plate he stands.

The right-handed hitter usually drops his right foot back, brings the bat around, shifts his right hand up about one-third of the bat, and has the fat end of the bat contact the ball, either dumping the ball down the third base line or pushing it past the pitcher toward the second baseman. If the bunter can make the second baseman field the ball, he usually has ample time to beat the throw to first base. Such a play requires excellent coordination.

The left-handed batter has the advantage of being closer to first base, thereby getting a better start than the right-handed hitter. When bunting for a base hit, the left-handed hitter pivots on his right foot and crosses his left leg over his right as he prepares to bunt the ball. This gives him a tremendous start. The left hand slides about one-third up the length of the bat, and the fat end of the bat makes contact with the ball. The hitter then dumps the ball down the third base line or drags the ball past the pitcher toward the second baseman. Any ball that the second baseman fields is almost sure to be a base hit, because he is playing deeper for a left-handed hitter and consequently has a good distance to go to field the ball. A bunt base hit is a beautiful thing to watch, because it takes great skill and there is plenty of action involved.

Squeeze Plays

The two types of squeeze play previously mentioned were the *safety squeeze* and the *suicide squeeze*. Everyone interested in baseball knows the purpose of the squeeze play is to score the runner from third base, even though the batter may have to sacrifice himself to do so. The squeeze may take place anytime

during the ball game, but it is usually employed to tie the score, score the winning run, or add an "insurance" run to the leading team's total. When a team is far behind or leading by a large score, there is no reason to attempt the squeeze play.

In the safety squeeze, the runner on third base takes a good lead but does not break for the plate until the ball is bunted. The runner waits until he knows that the ball will be on the ground before starting home. If the runner does this, it is impossible for him to be doubled up should the batter bunt the ball in the air to a defensive player. However, there is the danger of the runner being thrown out at home if he cannot run fast and the ball is bunted on the ground directly at a defensive player.

The suicide squeeze is very dangerous. On this play, the runner usually has a small lead and leaves third base for the plate as soon as the pitcher releases the ball to the batter. The baserunner cannot tip this play to the pitcher, or he will throw a pitch-out to get the runner at home. On this type of squeeze, the runner usually has a better start than on a safety squeeze; therefore, some coaches use the safety squeeze for their fast runners and the suicide squeeze for their slow runners. Of course, the bunter's skill also is considered when deciding what type of bunt play to use.

4

BASERUNNING

MOST YOUNG PLAYERS CAN IMPROVE THEIR BASERUNNING. THIS holds true for the slow runner as well as the fast runner. Because all ballplayers have been running from an early age, they take this activity for granted and do not realize they can improve their running.

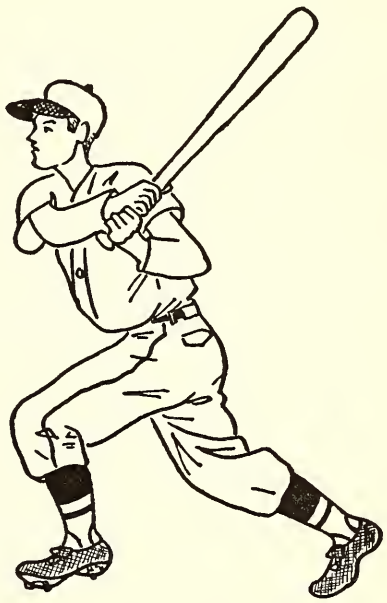
The importance of correct running form and procedure should be obvious. The faster a player can get down to first base the more base hits he will get; and he will hit into fewer double plays by getting down that line in a hurry. The batter will get more extra base hits if he can improve his running. The improved runner also can help his team by stealing bases, preventing force plays, breaking up the double play, going from first to third on a single, advancing on a fly ball, scoring on a sacrifice bunt, and in many other ways. *There is no reason why each player should not run to the best of his ability.*

Proper Form

After the batter has hit the ball, he should run as fast as he can to first base. He should not slam the bat down in disgust, watch

the flight of the ball, jog down the base path when it appears the ball will be caught easily, or do anything else that will delay his getting to first base. *The batter must break from the plate as quickly as he can after he has hit the ball and completed proper follow-through.*

Some players tie themselves up in knots at the completion of a swing and are slow in starting for first base. The batter should not start his run at the expense of his swing, but he should get going as soon as possible. He should run as fast as he can in a straight line for the bag, with his eyes up so that he can observe the defense, his coach, and, if possible, the ball. Too many base-runners run with their heads down. This is not very intelligent, and the only reason they do this is because it seems natural. They are trying to generate as much power as possible and think they are accomplishing this by running with their heads down and wildly flailing the arms back and forth.



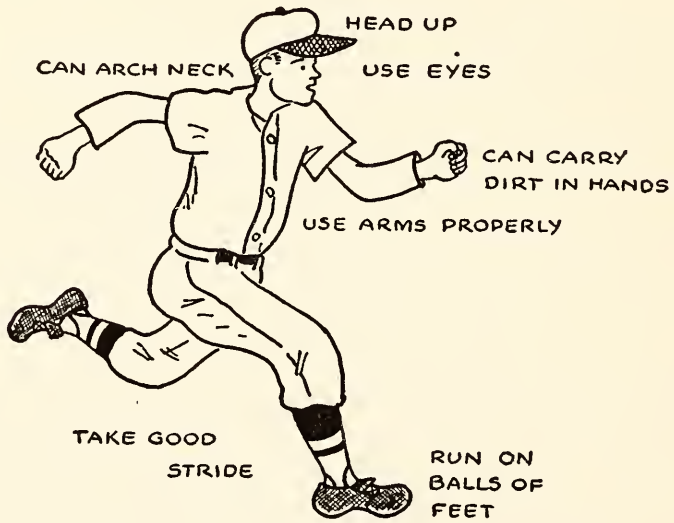
It is important to get off to a good start after the completion of the swing.

A baserunner should look where he is going. It would be stupid of him to run with his eyes closed, and it is almost as bad to run while looking at the ground. All a runner has to do to correct this fault is to arch his neck slightly. This will bring his face up perpendicular to the ground and he can see his objective, the next base.

Flailing the arms across the chest or back and forth hinders the runner also. The arms should move in rhythm with the body but not from side to side. A runner who flails his arms is only fighting himself and using up energy, and he is not increasing his speed. The elbows should be bent and close to the body, the

hands either open or clenched, and the arms moving forward and backward slightly with each stride. The hands should be pumped straight ahead.

Sometimes inexperienced players run on their heels instead of on the balls of their feet. This is poor form, and it decreases one's speed. The feet should follow each other in almost a



Proper form for the baserunner.

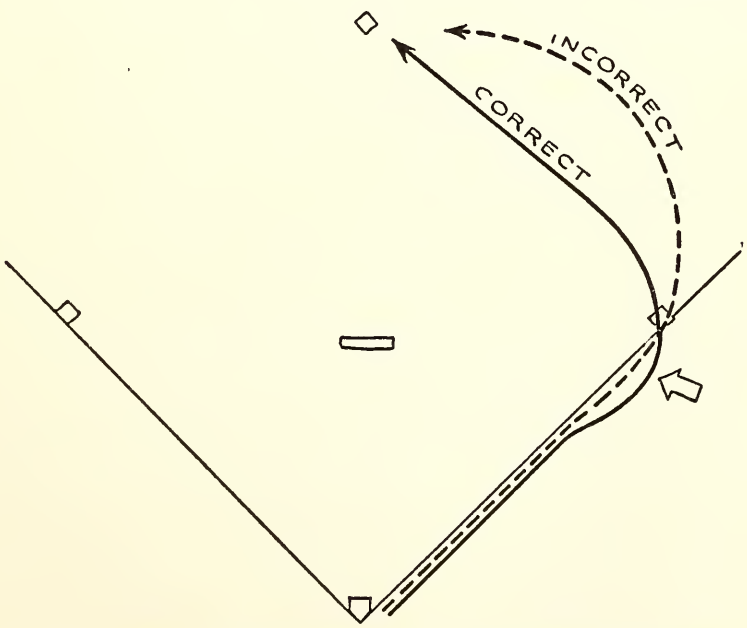
straight line. The weight should be on the balls of the feet, and as each knee is brought up, the leg should be extended to take a long stride. A runner should not exaggerate the stride, but if he is taking too short a stride, he can increase it by lifting his knees higher and throwing his feet out farther. This would make the lower leg, from the knee on down, describe a greater arc, increasing the distance in each stride.

Running the Bases

When a baserunner is trying to beat out an infield hit, he runs in a straight line directly to first base. After reaching the bag, he gradually slows up. There is no point in coming to a quick stop unless the ball goes by the first baseman. If this happens, the

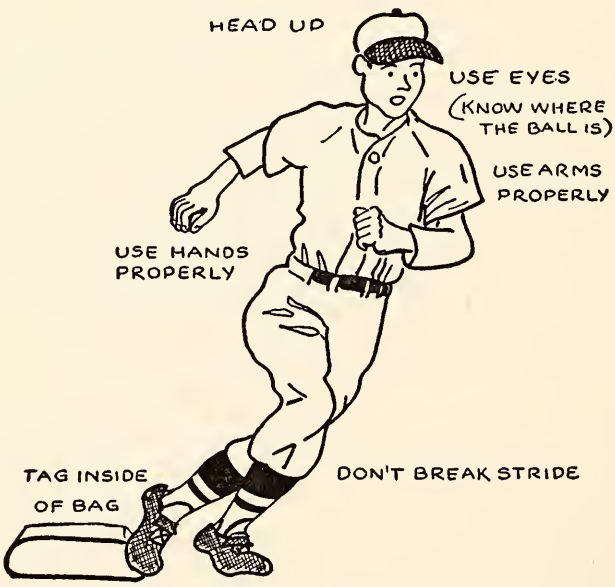
runner has to decide on the possibility of advancing to second base. However, if he is trying to get an extra-base hit, he has to make a turn at first base in order to get to second base. There is a story told of one runner who, when told by his coach to go from home plate to second base as quickly as possible, decided that a straight line was the shortest distance between two points and ran over the pitcher's mound to the keystone sack.

In order to make the turn at first base, a runner should run in as straight a line as he can, tag the inside corner of the bag (that part closest to the pitcher's rubber) with his left foot, and pivot on this foot as he continues to second base. This is difficult to do, and a runner may have to veer slightly to his right as he approaches first base to prevent making a large turn after he tags the bag. If the player has to make a choice between veering to his right before or after he crosses the bag, he veers *before* he comes to the base. He should not make a large turn after he tags the bag. This is important, although the runner may not be covering any greater over-all distance by making his turn after he tags the sack. The runner who veers before he comes to the



If you have to arc around first, do it the fast way.

base sees the play before him, and, if he thinks he can make second base, is running in a comparatively straight line to it. The runner who veers after he touches first base may also see the play before him, but he does not realize that in order to reach second base he must make an arc on the base path. He has to travel farther than he thinks he does from first to second base, and because of this extra distance he is more likely to get put out at second base. A runner should remember that the smaller arc he makes while rounding the base the better off he is. If he must make an arc, he should make the greater part of it before he comes to the base.



Tagging a base.

Sometimes it may be impossible for the baserunner to tag the inside corner of the base with his left foot without breaking his stride. *It is ideal to tag the bag with the left foot, pivot off it and head for the next base.* If the runner cannot hit the bag with his left foot without breaking stride, he tags the bag with his right foot. It is more important to keep in stride than to tag the bag with a certain foot. In either instance, the corner of the bag closest to the pitching rubber is the one to be tagged. The run-

ner may glance down at the bag so that he will not trip over it or miss it altogether, but his eyes come up off the ground once the bag has been touched.

Assistance from Coaches

The runner should know the location of the ball by the time he leaves first base. The first base coach may assist him by telling him what to do—go to second or hold up at first. It is important for him to know the throwing ability of every member of the defensive team, so that he may take full advantage of any weakness. As the runner approaches second base, he knows whether he has to slide or not. On a ball hit to right field, he may not know whether he should proceed to third base or hold up at second. He may look at the third base coach before he reaches second base or he may not. This may be too difficult to do while concentrating on coming into second base and tagging it; however, after he tags the bag, the runner *must* look at the third base coach to know if he should continue to third base or slam on the brakes and duck back into second base. If he gets the "come-on" sign from the coach, he keeps full steam ahead until he gets a further signal. The coach will tell him to hold up, slide, or continue to home plate. When the runner is heading for home plate, he picks up the signal from the next hitter, who is standing near the plate. This player should tell the runner whether to slide or stay up. In addition to his coaching duties, the "on-deck" hitter, as he is called, also should remove the bat from the home plate area, so that the runner will not harm himself by stepping or sliding on it.

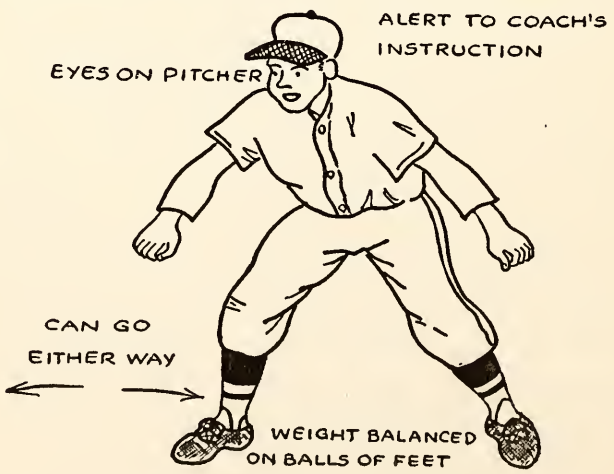
If you are on deck, be alert to see if you can help the baserunner.

Leads and Breaks

If the baserunner stops at first base, his next problem is to get an adequate lead while the pitcher is in his set position. *There is not much sense in getting a lead until the pitcher gets ready to pitch.* A runner is only inviting trouble if he takes a lead before the pitcher gets on the rubber.

In attempting to steal second base, the player must have an adequate lead. Many baserunners fail to steal a base because they are too timid or do not know how to take a proper lead. This does not mean that the baserunner should become rash and take a foolhardy lead. However, he must be daring to become a successful baserunner. If there is no runner on second base, the first baseman will play on the bag and the runner must be prepared to get back to the base in case the pitcher throws the ball there. Despite this, the runner should take a large enough lead to worry the pitcher. He should be ready to steal, take advantage of a passed ball or wild pitch, and be in a position to advance as far as possible on a batted ball.

If the runner is not going to steal, he takes a safe lead, one in which he can return to first base in the event a pick-off attempt



A player with a "two-way lead" is balanced so that he can proceed to the next base or return to the one he has just left.

is made. This is called a *one-way lead*. The runner is not trying to steal second base, and therefore should not be picked off base. However, this lead can cover as great or greater a distance than when the runner is going to attempt to steal second base. When assuming a one-way lead, the player always should be "leaning" toward first base, because he is not trying to steal second base. This leaning or weight shift should not be pronounced, for the pitcher will readily notice it.

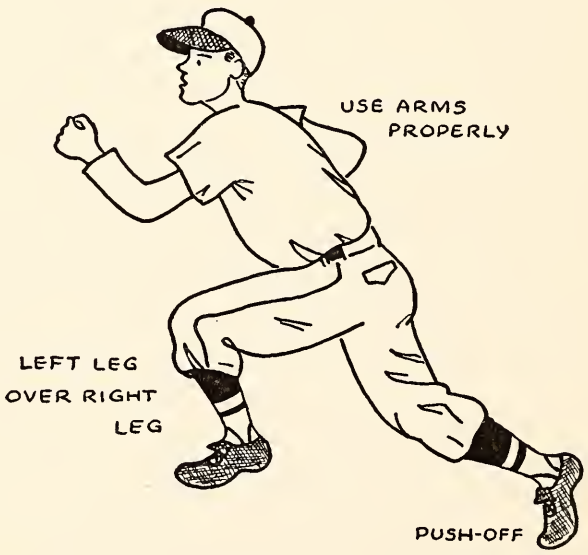
If the runner desires to steal second base, he assumes what is called a *two-way lead*. In this type of lead, the runner must be ready to go to second base as soon as he is sure the pitcher is going to throw to the plate. He must also be prepared to dart back to first base in case the pitcher elects to throw over there. The baserunner cannot be leaning either way when getting ready to steal, for he does not know which way he will be called upon to move at the moment. Since he may have to go either to his right or left, he may take a slightly shorter lead than when he is only going back to first base. The amount of lead will differ with the pitcher, and the runner's speed, coordination, and intentions.

While assuming his two-way lead, the baserunner has his weight balanced evenly on the balls of his feet and is ready to go in either direction. Once he determines the pitcher is going to the plate with the ball, the runner starts for second base. The start is of utmost importance to the successful baserunner. Many runners start off with their right foot, lifting it up, bringing it down, and then moving

When base running, use your arms at the beginning of the cross-over step to help swing your body around.

the left foot. By using this incorrect start, a runner is only gaining a few inches with his initial step. He should learn to use the *cross-over step*, in which the player pivots, swinging his left leg over his right, and pushes off with his right foot, thus gaining a few feet instead of a few inches. The full step at the start is important in baserunning and fielding, but more about this later.

A runner may take what is called a *walking lead*. As the pitcher assumes his set position, the runner walks off the bag



When running the bases, use the cross-over step.

toward second base. If the pitcher makes no effort to throw the ball to first base, the runner takes a few more steps, and when the pitcher throws to the plate, he is off and running. This walking procedure gives the runner a little impetus in his start, but he must be alert to the possibility of the pick-off throw. When a runner is trying to steal a base, he should remember to—take enough lead, be balanced to go either way, use the cross-over step to start, run with his head up, and use proper running form.

While on first base, a baserunner can worry the pitcher and catcher by faking to steal second base. After the pitcher delivers

to the plate, the runner starts for second base as if he were going to steal. However, after a couple of steps he stops in time to return to first base before the catcher can throw the ball to the first baseman. After a few such false starts, the defense may be lulled into a false sense of security, and the runner makes his break and continues on to second base. This maneuvering also can make the defense so jittery that the catcher is liable to throw the ball away or the infielder is apt to flub the throw when the runner finally goes.

This faking is a help when the runner receives a steal sign that is not "mandatory"—when he does not have to go unless he gets the proper lead and break. He can practice these fakes, and as soon as he feels he has the jump on the pitcher he is off and running. If he feels that he doesn't have the jump, he just retreats to first base after the fake.

Sliding

A good baserunner has to know how to slide. Some players hurt their hands when sliding by dragging them along the ground or by keeping the fingers extended and accidentally jamming them into something or someone. To prevent this, some experienced baserunners grab handfuls of dirt upon reaching first base. The reason for this is not, as one youngster once said,

TAG BAG WITH RIGHT FOOT
EYES ON BAG
HANDS UP (OUT OF DANGER)
FEET UP (OUT OF DANGER)
LEFT BUTTOCK ABSORBS MOST OF SHOCK
SLIDE — DON'T JUMP

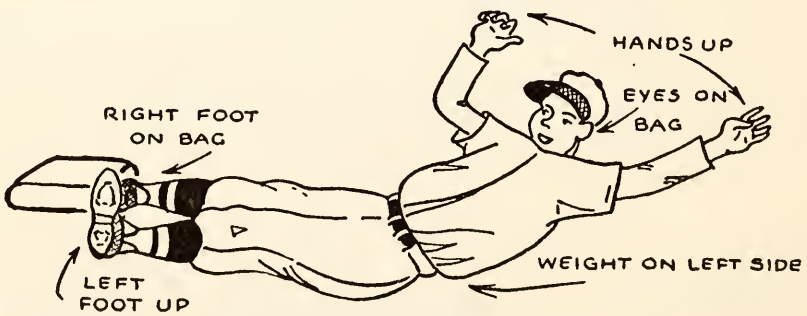
Sliding to your left.

"to throw it into the eyes of the second baseman," but to make the runner keep the fists clenched and prevent injury.

There are many ways to slide, and sliding is one of the most neglected phases of the game. To become a proficient slider, a player must practice (see *Drills* page 160) this skill the same as any other. He should learn to slide on either his left or right side, because he usually wants to slide away from the defensive player and not into him.

A ballplayer has to have confidence in his ability to slide, and to overcome any fears he may have he should practice in a sliding pit. When sliding on his *left* side, the player bears the brunt of his slide on the left buttock and then the left part of the back. He can take some of the shock almost up to the left shoulder.

A player should remember that it is a *slide* and not a *leap.* It is important that a runner keep both feet off the ground so that his spikes will not dig into the dirt. Most sliding injuries come from catching the spikes into the ground or jamming them into the bag. Minor injuries, such as "strawberries," scrapes, and



A correct completed slide.

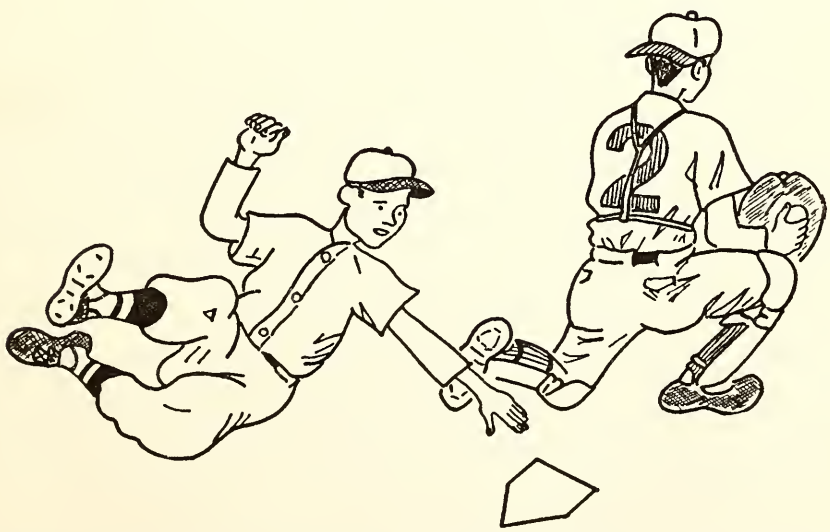
bruises, usually heal quickly. However, some players experience difficulty in getting a strawberry to heal because each new slide aggravates the injury. A piece of gauze, rolled and shaped to a doughnut form, can be placed over the strawberry. It can be held in place by adhesive tape. The advantage of such a dressing

is that it prevents the uniform from coming into contact with the skin and permits new skin to form.

When sliding on the *left* side, as the runner throws both feet into the air he points his right foot so that the top of it tags the bag. This prevents the spikes from catching in the base. The left foot is held higher than the right so that no harm will befall it. The slide should be started early enough so that the runner will reach the bag but not slide into it hard or past it. A hard slide will shake a runner up and an overslide may result in his being tagged out.

As the player slides he should hold his elbows up off the ground so that he will not injure his arms or hands. His neck is bent, bringing his head forward and up, and his eyes are on the base. A runner sliding on his right side follows almost the same procedure, except that his right side takes the shock of the slide and he tags the base with his left foot. As the runner becomes more experienced, he can learn variations of this slide.

A runner on second base who is moving toward third on a single should watch the third base coach for a signal. The coach will tell him either to hold up or go on home. The coach's posi-



Correct sliding form. The base runner has his eyes on the plate and is taking the path of "least resistance."

tion for such a play is at the home plate end of the coaching box, so that he can hold the runner up at the last possible moment or wave him home.

When a runner is coming home and the catcher is blocking the plate, ready to catch the ball, the baserunner may slide around him. The catcher is not allowed to block the plate when not in possession of the ball, but some plays are so close and the thrown ball arrives in such a spot that the baserunner may find the catcher obstructing his path. Rather than crash into the catcher, the runner may slide off to the side of the plate and tag it with his hand as he goes by. This maneuver prevents a collision without delaying the baserunner in reaching his destination.

The Double Steal

The double steal may be employed in several situations, but it usually occurs late in the ball game when there are runners on first and third, two out, a weak hitter at bat, and the score tied. The run is very important, and the possibility of the batter driving it in is slim. The steal must be made before the batter has two strikes on him; otherwise the batter is liable to strike out before the run can score. Also, the batter may have to swing to protect the plate when there are two strikes on him.

Both runners should have good leads, and the runner on first breaks for second when the pitcher delivers the ball to the plate. The catcher can do one of three things: throw the ball to second base, throw the ball back to the pitcher, or bluff a throw to second base and throw to the third baseman. This makes it tough for the runner on third. If the ball does not go all the way through to second base, he should not attempt to go home. A ball cut off by the pitcher or a bluff by the catcher will hang up the runner between third and home if he falls for a fake. Any time a runner is caught in a rundown, the chances are that he will be tagged out. If the runner waits until the ball goes by the pitcher on its way to second base, he will have a difficult

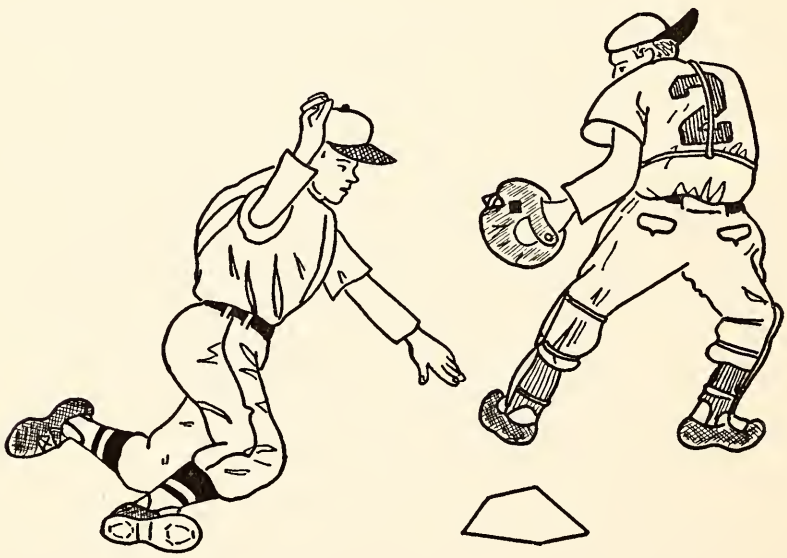
time scoring if the infielder handles the ball cleanly. He should be aware of the possible defensive plays and make his break for home as soon as he thinks the ball is going to second base. If the runner on first wants to tempt the catcher into throwing to second base, he takes his time going down the base path. If the throw to second base beats the runner, he can stop so that he will not be tagged out before the run scores.

Sliding in front of the catcher.

If there are less than two out, men on first and third, and the catcher throws to second base on an attempted double steal, the runner going into second base can *slide away from the bag out toward centerfield.* The infielder who is making the tag may become so absorbed in getting the runner that he will follow him out past second base. While the infielder is chasing the slider, the runner on third base has time to score. The umpire may call the runner out at second base for sliding out of the base path, but this is not important if the run scores. *The important thing to remember is that this play must be worked with less than two out.* Otherwise, the slider at the keystone sack may make the third out before his teammate scores.

The Rundown

When there are two or more runners on base and the front runner is caught in a rundown, the other baserunner should advance. Whenever a baserunner is caught in a rundown, the chances favor his being put out. To take advantage of his teammate's predicament, the other runner moves up as far as he can to the base the front runner left. If the trapped runner successfully eludes the defense and advances, then every baserunner



To avoid a collision, slide around the catcher and tag the plate with your hand.

has improved his position. If the trapped runner is put out, the other runner is in better position. If the trapped runner regains the base he originally left, he is entitled to it and the second advancing baserunner must shift for himself. This baserunner will be out if he remains on the base and is tagged by the defense, because two baserunners cannot occupy the same base at the same time. After he has made sure that the front runner has regained the base, the second baserunner will have to retrace his steps in an attempt to get back to his own base safely. If this

second runner is caught in another rundown, the front runner may or may not try to advance.

Game Situations

The runner usually should not attempt to advance from second to third base on a ball hit in front of him, a ball that is fielded by the shortstop or third baseman. If he does he may be tagged out, and it is more important for his team to have him remain in scoring position on second base than be thrown out at third and have the batter reach first. The runner assumes all responsibility if he decides to try to make third base in such a situation. There is nothing the coach can do about it. The runner cannot take too large a lead off second base or the second baseman will sneak up behind him, take a throw from the left side of the infield and tag him out. If the runner on second base gets the signal to steal third, the batter can help him by faking a bunt. This bluff by the batter will draw the third baseman toward the plate, and he will not be in good position to take the throw from the catcher.

When the runner is on third base, he takes his lead in foul territory. Then, if he happens to get hit by a batted ball, he will not be out. If he were standing in fair ground, he would be out automatically. If the catcher throws down to the third baseman attempting to pick the runner off base, the runner goes back to third base directly on the base line, for there is no purpose for remaining in foul ground after the pitch. The baserunner on third should get as big a lead as possible. He wants to worry the pitcher and possibly affect his control, be prepared to take advantage of a passed ball or wild pitch, or be able to score on balls hit to the infield or on a squeeze play.

The runner must remain alert to the danger of a caught line drive that could result in his being doubled at third base. He also must keep in mind that he will have to return to the base to tag up in case of a fly ball. If there are two out and the ball is hit, the runner has no choice but to go home.

5

PITCHING

IF ANY POSITION WAS TO BE SINGLED OUT AS THE MOST IMPORTANT one on a baseball team, almost everyone would agree that it would be the pitcher. The play starts with the pitcher, who has the ball in his hand. If the pitcher could get the ball through the strike zone and past the batter on every pitch, or force him to hit it so that it could be easily handled by the defense, baseball would be a rather simple game.

It is too much to expect of the pitcher to strike out every hitter, or even most hitters. The young pitcher should concentrate on getting the ball in the strike zone with "something on it." What that something may be depends on the pitcher's ability to throw various kinds of balls, his knowledge of the hitter, the situation in the ball game, and the count on the batter. Many pitchers use their best pitch when in a jam, with men in scoring position in a close ball game. But a pitcher whose best pitch is his fast ball cannot throw fast balls to the batter continually. This pitcher may waste his curve ball, or some other pitch, in order to set the batter up for his fast ball. When a pitcher "wastes" a pitch, it does not mean that he throws a pitch-out. A waste pitch usually should be close enough to the strike zone to

tempt the hitter to swing at it. If he does hit it, he will be unable to get a good piece of the ball. Pitching to an inexperienced batter, a pitcher may be able to get him to swing at a ball that is unhittable (a pitch that the batter cannot reach with the bat).

When the batter has the opportunity to drive in some runs, the pressure on him is just as great, if not greater, as that on the pitcher. The good hitter has about one chance in three (a .333 average) to get a base hit, although he may get on base through an error or base on balls. This would indicate that against any batter, in any situation, *the odds are with the pitcher*. However, a pitcher cannot become careless when pitching to any batter, no matter how weak the hitter may be. As long as a player is up there swinging a bat, he is dangerous.

Condition

Many young pitchers feel that, to get in condition for baseball, all they have to do is throw, throw, throw, and get their arms in shape. Many coaches contend that it is just as important for a pitcher's legs to be in condition. The pitcher should know that his entire body has to be in good physical condition. He may neglect conditioning his legs, because he doesn't realize the importance of it or because he is lazy. If he is lazy, he shouldn't be attempting to play baseball.

A pitcher has to do as much running as any other ballplayer. He has to run before the season starts and during the season. In addition to running laps on an indoor track or outside on the diamond, the pitcher should shag flies. After regular practice, he should have a fungo hitter chase him back and forth in the outfield catching fly balls. This takes some of the drudgery out of running, for the pitcher is trying to catch the fly balls, and he must run to do so. Wind sprints also help a pitcher attain the necessary physical condition. He should run as hard as he can for about twenty yards, walk about ten yards, and then run again. This procedure should be followed up and down the field.

Warm-Up

A pitcher should make sure that he is thoroughly warmed-up before he enters a game. If he is starting a game, this is not too great a problem, because he usually allows himself fifteen or twenty minutes before game time in which to throw. If a relief pitcher is starting an inning, he usually has ample time to warm up before going into the game. It is the relief pitcher who comes into a game during the inning who has a problem. He is needed for an emergency which may have arisen quite quickly; he does not have too much time to prepare himself for his job, yet he is expected to come in and "put out the fire." No coach is going to put a pitcher in a ball game if he knows he is going to be injured, but the coach cannot always anticipate the need for a relief pitcher and sometimes is forced to put in a hurler who has not had the usual warm-up period. This is a calculated risk that is part of baseball—the possibility of being spiked, hit by a ball, or running into a fence, the collision of two players, an injury while sliding, and other such perils, are all part of the game. There are inherent dangers in any sport or activity. This is true of everyday living—crossing the street, driving a car, climbing a flight of stairs, taking a bath, and the occupational hazards involved in any job all are dangerous.

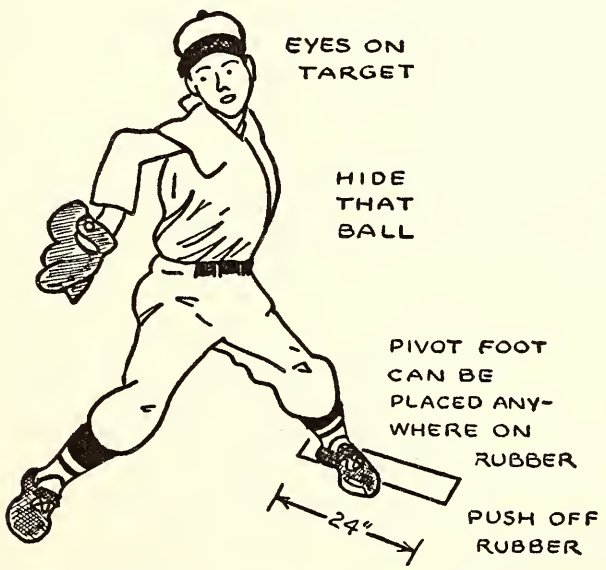
Importance of Control

What are the qualifications of a good pitcher? He must have *control*, *a strong arm*, *intelligence*, *courage*, *poise*, *endurance*, and *knowledge of the rules*. Many baseball men believe that the most important factor is *control*.

A pitcher may have the best repertoire in baseball, but he will not be a successful pitcher unless he can get the ball over the plate. Any pitcher can improve his control if he practices correctly. It is important to practice correctly. Otherwise, a pitcher may become so confused that he will not know what

he is doing and, in a desperate attempt to gain control, will listen to anyone and do anything. Good control is not an accident. A pitcher may be born with the ability to throw hard, but control is something that can be developed. There will be days when a pitcher may have better control than other days, but he should have, and can have, fairly good control at all times.

It is not enough for a coach to say to a pitcher, "Your control is bad." The coach should be able to teach the pitcher how to gain control. After he has been taught, it is the pitcher's responsibility to practice, in order to perfect his control. Poor control can be caused by many things. Sometimes there is only one small fault preventing a pitcher from controlling the ball, and sometimes there are many reasons why he has poor control.



A pitcher may improve his horizontal control by shifting his foot on the rubber.

Poor control may be due to improper stance on the rubber, poor head control, improper delivery, holding (fingering) the ball incorrectly, and possibly other reasons. No two hurlers throw the ball in exactly the same manner, although their actions may

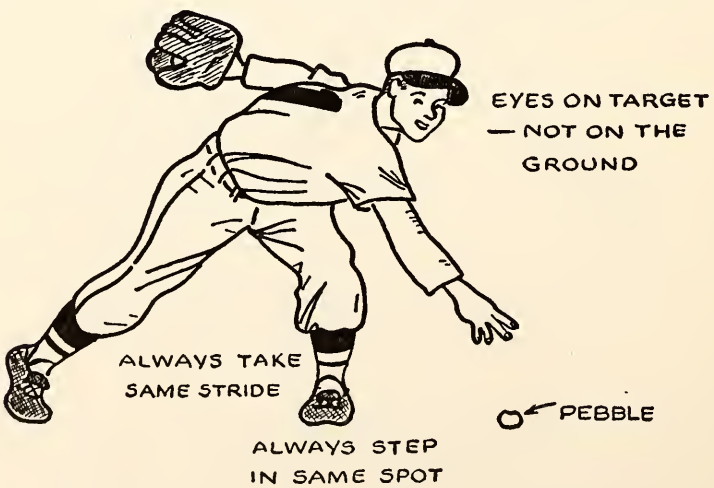
resemble one another. *Be aware of individual differences in every phase of the game.*

Horizontal Control

A pitcher may be doing everything correctly and still have trouble with his control because he is constantly throwing the ball outside or inside to a right-handed hitter. The pitcher who has this trouble, always throwing the ball out of the strike zone but in the same general area, may correct his control by changing his *horizontal position* on the rubber. He moves to the right side of the rubber if he is constantly pitching outside to a right-handed hitter, or he shifts to the left side of the rubber if he is pitching inside to a right-handed hitter. He has to stay on the rubber, but he does not have to assume his pitching position in the middle of the rubber. The rubber is twenty-four inches long, and the pitcher has this latitude in which to move.

Vertical Control

The pitcher who consistently throws the ball high, around the batter's shoulders, head, or higher, may do this because he



To practice a good follow-through, bend over to pick up a pebble.

fails to bend his back as he throws. This type of pitcher is throwing from an upright position, and if he would bend his body he would be able to throw the ball lower. To get the pitcher in the habit of bending his body, this procedure can be followed:

Have the pitcher bend his back as he throws to the catcher once. Carefully note where the pitcher's right hand (if he is right-handed) comes to rest after he follows through. It should stop a few inches above the ground near the left foot. Mark the spot directly beneath his right hand and place a pebble, orange peel, resin bag, or some small object at this spot. Then have the pitcher warm up with the catcher, picking up this object each time he throws, and replacing it so it is ready for the next pitch. The pitcher does not look at the object. He keeps his eyes on the target as he throws, completes his follow-through, and extends his hand a few inches to pick up the object. Naturally, the pitcher has to stand on the same spot on the rubber each time. He also has to step in the same spot on every pitch. He should step in a flat-footed manner, and be in such a position that he can field a ball hit directly back at him. This means his feet should be at right angles to the pitching rubber.

Pre-Inning Warm-Up

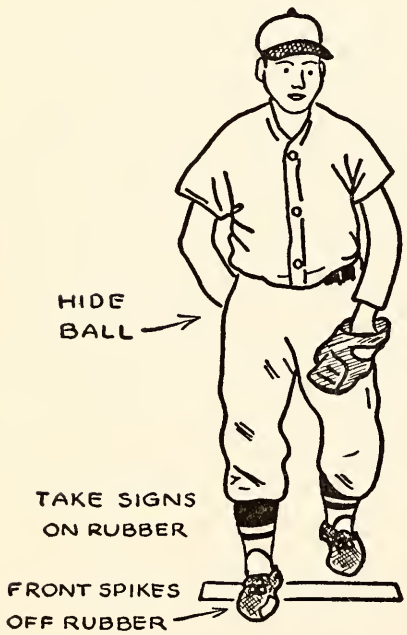
A pitcher should practice his control at every opportunity. When he is throwing during his pre-game or pre-inning warm-up time, he should take full advantage of such periods to improve his control by throwing to certain targets. He may throw at some spot on the catcher, his left knee, right knee,

Use these target-spots in the pre-inning warm-up.

left shoulder, or right shoulder, for example. Too many pitchers use the time to loosen up their muscles only, and not to improve their control. A pitcher can do both of these things at the same time. It does not take any more physical effort.

Taking Signals

The first thing a pitcher has to do in a game is to take the signals from the catcher. It is important that the catcher know what type of pitch is coming, so that he can adjust himself to catch it.



Getting signs from the catcher with no runners on base.

Never cross up a catcher and throw something that he did not call for. If there is some confusion as to signs, request time out and get matters straightened out as quickly as possible. The pitcher should never complain to the catcher that the signal given was a poor one, because the batter got a base hit or a walk. The pitcher has the opportunity to "shake off" a catcher's signs whenever he desires. There may be a few moments in a ball game when it is desirable for the pitcher to shake off the catcher, even though he agrees with the sign and is eventually going to throw the pitch called for. This apparent disagreement on the part of the battery sometimes confuses the hitter and has him wondering what is going on, so that he is unprepared for the pitch when it comes.

The correct way for a pitcher to take a sign is when he is on the rubber, if there are no men on base. It is impossible to commit a balk with the bases empty. The pitcher should conserve his strength as much as possible and should not do any un-

necessary walking around on the mound or toward the catcher, or amble around the infield. If an infielder wants to talk to the pitcher, let the infielder come to the mound.

While the pitcher is standing on the mound awaiting the signal, he should keep the ball out of the batter's view. He can do this simply by placing his right hand behind the lower part of his back. The pitcher then takes his sign and starts his windup, bringing the glove up in front of him to hide the ball from the batter, the back of the glove facing the hitter.

Most pitchers use as large a glove as possible. This helps to hide the ball from the batter, and when a hard-hit ball comes through the box and the pitcher cannot field it, he is liable to deflect it to some infielder who can throw the batter out. To avoid confusion, the correct procedure for a *right-handed* pitcher will be explained. A left-handed pitcher can adapt this information to his particular needs.

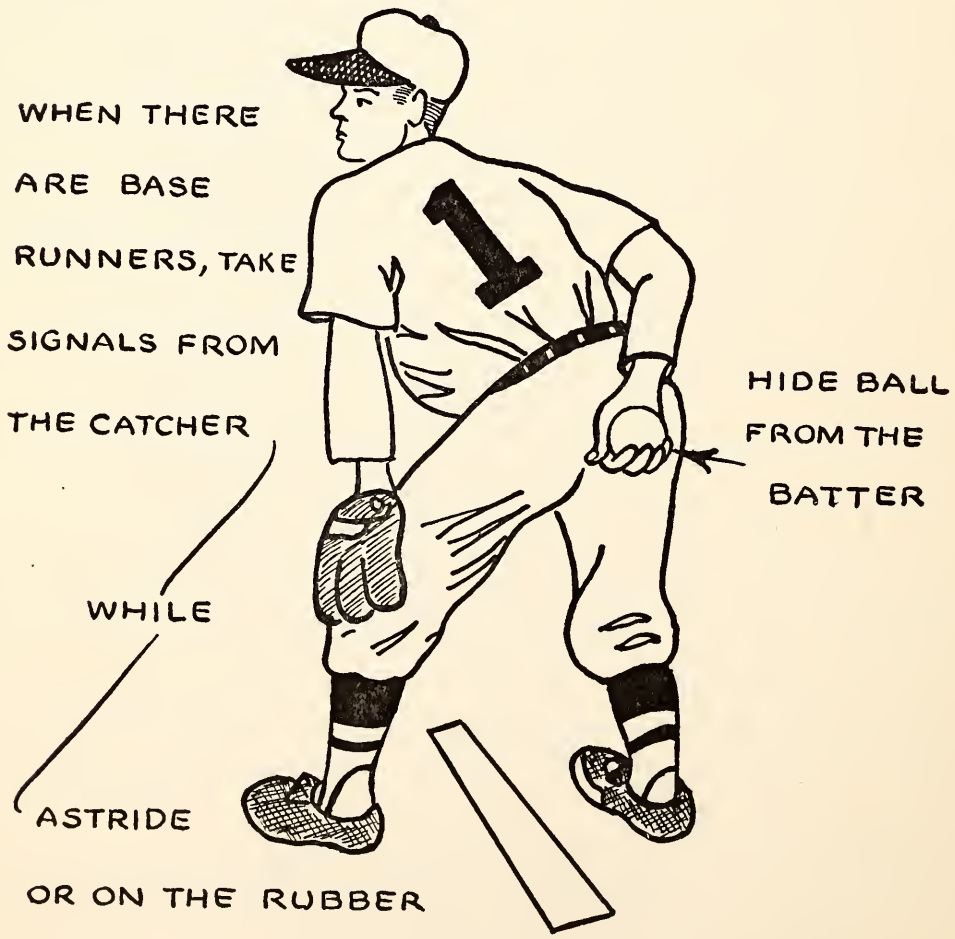
Start your wind-up this way. Remember—always keep your eyes on the target!

Many pitchers do not stand on the mound properly because they do not know how to stand correctly. When they first started to pitch, they stood a certain way and have continued to do so because no one has taught them differently, and they haven't had the experience to correct themselves.

The position of the pitcher's right foot while he is starting his windup is of utmost importance. Many an inexperienced pitcher stands with his right foot completely on top of the rubber or the front of his foot on the rubber. This is incorrect, for the

front spikes on the bottom of the shoe prevent proper balance, and he cannot have good control. The pitcher should have only his right rear spikes on top of the rubber. The front spikes should be in front of the rubber, and the pitcher should come off the rubber with the heel of the foot, his weight coming down to the front part of the foot, this part of the foot pushing back against the front part of the rubber. This can help the pitcher throw the ball harder, because the planting of the right foot gives him a foundation from which he can push off. A slight turning of the ankle usually accompanies such a maneuver.

When a pitcher is taking his signs from the catcher with a



It is difficult to commit a balk when you are astride the rubber.

man or men on base, he can stand with his right foot touching the rubber. This does not mean that the right foot should be on top of the rubber. A pitcher can stand with his right heel on the rubber and the front part of the foot in front of the rubber in a sort of pigeon-toed fashion, or he can have the right (outer) side of his right foot in contact with the rubber. If a pitcher feels that he may commit a balk while taking his signs in such a position, he may take his signs while astride the rubber, the left foot in front of it and the right foot behind it. Once he gets his sign, he must assume the proper position for delivery, with the right foot contacting the rubber. A pitcher should not wander all over the mound, taking signs from any position near the rubber, walking around in circles between pitches, uselessly using up his strength and energy.

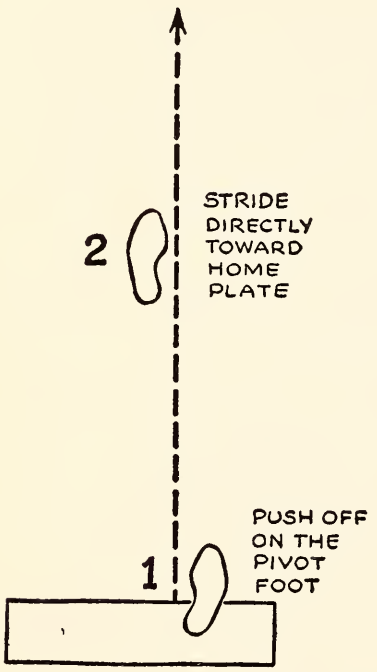
Eyes on Target

As soon as the pitcher gets his signal and starts his windup, he keeps his eyes, both of them, on his target. Some pitchers have the bad habit of glancing at the ground as they raise their hands over their heads and then trying to pick up the target as they release the ball. Few can do this successfully. A pitcher should keep his eyes on the target until the ball goes into the catcher's glove or comes off the bat. Some pitchers, particularly when there is a man on base and they have assumed the proper set pitching position, only look at the target with one eye as they are facing third base. Look at the target with *both* eyes.

With no men on, hide the ball this way when taking signs.

Stepping

As the pitcher steps to throw, it is important for him *to step almost straight forward with his left foot.* If a line were drawn from the inside of the pitcher's right foot to home plate, the left foot would fall to the left of this line when the stride was taken correctly. If a pitcher steps in such a manner, he is not throwing "across his body." The player who throws across his body "locks" his upper arm with his chest, and does not have a free and easy motion or proper follow-through. This affects his control. (A pitcher who throws sidearm or uses a cross-fire delivery would be an exception to this principle.) A pitcher can determine if he is stepping correctly by scratching a line with his spikes from the spot where his right foot normally is placed, on the rubber, toward home plate. He then can pitch, and see at what position his left foot is in regard to this line after each toss.



If you are a right-handed pitcher, step as shown above.

A pitcher should step in the same spot for each pitch. This means that he should take the same stride every time he throws the ball. The pitcher who varies his stride, striding a greater distance on some pitches and a lesser distance on others, will have trouble with his control. Some hurlers think it is important to take a giant stride as they pitch, but this is not necessary—the player should take a comfortable stride. A pitcher who lifts his leg as high as he can and takes an unusually long stride is inviting trouble from opposing baserunners, who will be able to get a good start toward the next base. The catcher will find it difficult

to keep runners from stealing, and it will be the pitcher's fault.

As the pitcher's left foot comes down for the pitch, it should not only come down in the same place each time, but it also should come down in the same position every time. This means that the left foot should make contact with the ground in a flat-footed fashion. This will prevent the pitcher from becoming a "heel-stepper." A boy whose heel hits the ground first as he strides to throw may have difficulty with his control, because he is being jarred every time he releases the ball. A pitcher may not realize it, but this slight jar can affect his entire body motion and cause his control to be off. *The entire foot should make contact with the ground at the same instant.*

Make sure you maintain good balance during your wind-up.

Fielding Position

Sometimes a pitcher tries to put a little extra on a pitch, and in doing so he does not come to a proper follow-through position, but "falls off the mound." This means that the right-handed pitcher, after delivering the ball to the batter, cannot check his momentum and finds himself completing his pitching motion off to the left of the mound, facing first base or the first base foul line. This affects a pitcher's control adversely, because he has poor control of his body, is off balance, and consequently cannot throw the ball where he desires. Also, a hurler who throws in this manner is not in position to field the ball if it is hit back at him, because he is off toward the first base side of

the mound, he is facing the right foul line, and his right foot is in front of his left foot.

The correct position for a pitcher to be in after completing his delivery is—*facing home plate, both feet at right angles to the rubber in a comfortable spread stance, with the weight on the balls of his feet.* The pitcher should be ready to field a ball

Correct fielding position for a left-handed pitcher. His eyes are on his target, his back is bent, and his feet are even, weight evenly distributed.

hit directly back at him, or be prepared to move to his right or left to field a ground ball, soft fly, or bunt. If the pitcher fields a hard-hit ball and the play is at first base, he waits until the first baseman gets to the bag before making his throw.

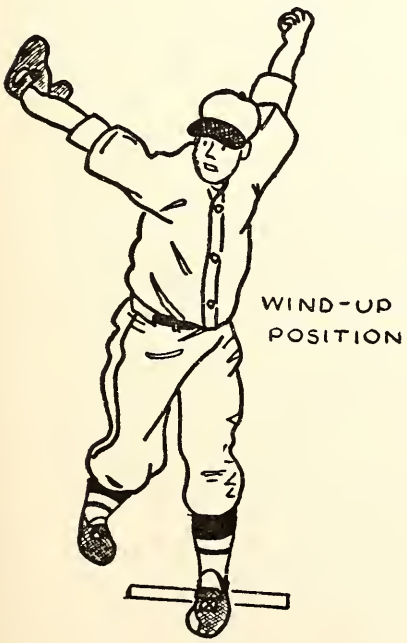
Many pitchers finish their delivery with the right foot closer to home plate than the left foot. This is not desirable, but if a pitcher cannot correct his delivery so that the feet are even with one another, he may compensate for this by taking an additional step with his left foot. This means that he pushes off the rubber with his right foot, steps forward with the left foot, and follows through with his right foot. If the feet are not in nearly perfect

alignment, the pitcher then takes an additional step forward with his left foot, bringing it even with his right foot. His weight is on the balls of his feet. This step must be taken quickly and become automatic, so that the pitcher is in perfect position to field a line drive hit through the box.

Catch return throws with your gloved hand only.

Return of Ball

In order to make his job as easy as possible, the pitcher should follow certain procedures. Whenever the catcher, umpire, or some infielder throws him the ball, he should catch it one-handed. There are only two players on the whole team who sometimes are permitted to use one hand when they can use two. They are the pitcher and first baseman. The pitcher should try to catch every ball returned to the mound with one hand, so that he may protect his pitching hand. On a lob or slow throw, a player sometimes puts his bare hand in the glove too quickly and the ball hits the back of his hand or his fingers and causes injury. A pitcher cannot afford to have his pitching hand injured, and it is foolish to take any needless risk.



Southpaw winding up.

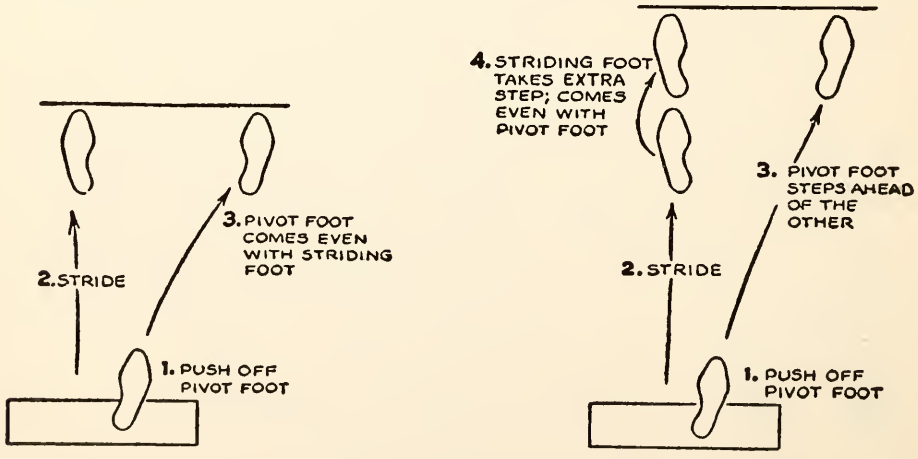
After an offensive player has been retired and there are no runners on base, it is customary for the infield to throw the ball around before it is

returned to the pitcher. There is no set pattern for this relay, because it will vary according to where the ball was hit. The pitcher should not attempt to follow the ball from one player to another, wondering when someone is going to throw it to him. He should not be concerned with the flight of the ball, but should expect it to be returned to him by way of the third baseman after the infield has finished tossing it around.

Grip or Fingering

To control the ball as much as possible, it is important to hold it correctly. Proper fingering of the ball is necessary so that it will do what the pitcher wants it to do. If a pitcher throws a curve ball and never knows how much it is going to break each time, he cannot control it. If a pitcher has several types of curve balls and knows how each one will act, this is an entirely different matter. He knows what pitch he is going to throw and what it will do.

A pitcher should be consistent in his grip on each type of pitch. He should hold his fast ball the same way every time; this is true also of his other pitches, whether they are curves, sliders, screwballs, knuckleballs, change-ups, or some freak delivery.


3. PIVOT FOOT COMES EVEN WITH STRIDING FOOT
2. STRIDE
1. PUSH OFF PIVOT FOOT
4. STRIDING FOOT TAKES EXTRA STEP; COMES EVEN WITH PIVOT FOOT
3. PIVOT FOOT STEPS AHEAD OF THE OTHER
2. STRIDE
1. PUSH OFF PIVOT FOOT

Fielding positions for the right-handed pitcher: normal-step position (left) and extra-step position (right). The left foot is even-numbered; the right foot is odd-numbered.

The proper way to throw any type of pitch can be debated at great length by baseball men, without any of them coming to complete agreement. This book will not deal with the various ways to throw each pitch. It will explain one way, the way we believe is the correct way for the majority of pitchers to throw the ball. This does not mean that all other ways are incorrect. Any skill can be accomplished in various ways, and the best way will depend on the individual. We will explain *how* we think the ball should be held for different pitches for best results, and *why*.

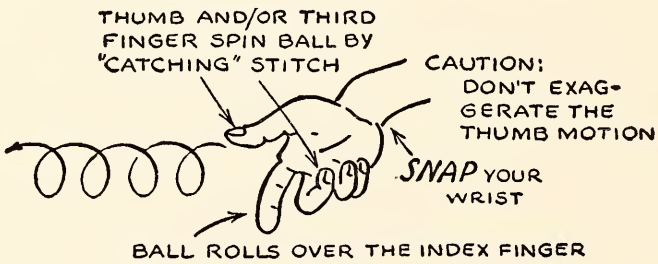
Fast Ball. It is important for a pitcher to have a good fast ball. The natural ability that a player is blessed with to throw the ball hard varies with the individual. *But anyone can improve his fast ball if he holds the ball properly.*

The fast ball should be held with the index and middle fingers on top of the ball and the thumb underneath the ball. The other fingers are bent, and the fourth finger rests alongside the ball. This grip forms sort of an isosceles triangle. The index and middle fingers are spread slightly (about one-quarter to one-half inch), and the thumb bisects these two fingers. The distances from the index finger to the thumb and the middle finger to the thumb are about equal. The ball is held near the ends of the fingers and thumb—not at the very end, but so that the first row of knuckles can grasp a seam on the ball. *It is of utmost importance that the ball be held across the FOUR seams.*

Fast-ball grip. Notice the thumb and fingers.

The seams on a baseball curve, and the first knuckle of the middle finger should be placed across the wider part of this curved seam. The first knuckle of the index finger should be placed across the narrower part of the seam. This allows the ball to fit into the hand more comfortably, and it also permits better

rotation of the ball. As the ball is thrown overhand or three-quarters overhand (this grip is not for sidearm pitchers), it will have backward rotation. The fingers leave the ball last and cause it to spin backward on its axis. The fact that the ball is held across the four seams makes it possible for the atmosphere to act upon four seams instead of two as the ball flies through the air from the pitching rubber to home plate (a distance of sixty feet, six inches). What atmospheric conditions will prevail depends upon climate, weather, construction of the park, and other fac-


THUMB AND/OR THIRD FINGER SPIN BALL BY "CATCHING" STITCH
CAUTION: DON'T EXAGGERATE THE THUMB MOTION
SNAP YOUR WRIST
BALL ROLLS OVER THE INDEX FINGER

Releasing the curve ball.

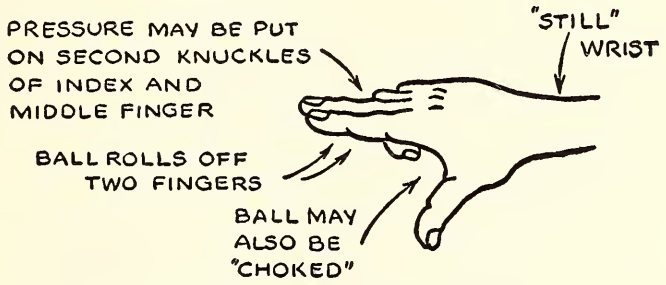
tors. A ball delivered in this manner has a greater tendency to take off or hop and, naturally, is more difficult to hit than a ball that comes in straight to the batter, even though the velocity of both balls is the same. Velocity depends upon the individual's ability to throw hard. All other things being equal, the longer a pitcher's arm and fingers, the faster he will be able to throw the ball. A strong, supple wrist is a great aid to a pitcher.

The faster the ball rotates on its way to the plate, the greater the blend of the red stitches with the white part of the ball. This makes it more difficult for the batter to follow the pitch.

A characteristic of a good fast ball is the "tail" it has as it goes by the batter. For an instant the ball seems to defy the law of gravity and take off. To develop this tail on a pitch, a pitcher may release the ball off the right "front" side of his middle finger, instead of off the ends of his fingers. This may cut down on his velocity, and whether this effort is worth while is for the pitcher and coach to decide. *Do not attempt to throw a fast ball*

with three fingers on top of the ball. Two fingers are all that are necessary to hold the ball, and a third may adversely affect one's control and velocity.

Fast Ball Change-Up. A young player does not need too many pitches in his repertoire to become a good pitcher. A fast ball, a curve, and a change on each of these two pitches is all he needs. The change on the fast ball is simple to throw, although a young pitcher may have difficulty controlling it at first. The ball is gripped in the same manner as the fast ball,

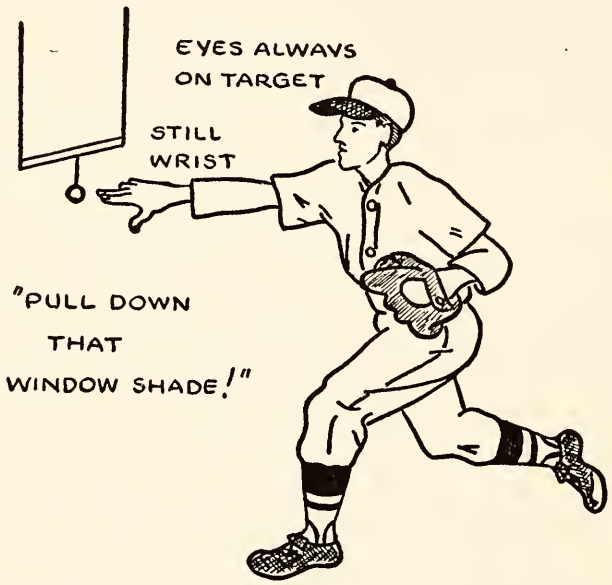


Releasing the fast-ball change-up.

except that it is held further back toward the palm of the hand. As the ball is released, the wrist is held still (no snap) and greater pressure is put on the second row of knuckles of the index and middle fingers. These fingers, from the second knuckles to the ends, straighten out, and the ball rolls off the finger tips. This motion is similar to reaching out and pulling down a window shade by inserting the index and middle fingers in the circular tassel. If a pitcher has difficulty mastering the fast ball change, he might try jamming the ball back in the palm of his hand. This is called *choking the ball.* A pitcher should not be surprised if the first few times he tries to throw the fast ball change, he throws the ball over the catcher's head.

The entire pitching motion for the change-up should be the same as that for the fast ball. In fact, the pitcher's motion should be the same for every pitch. Some young pitchers throw their fast ball overhand and their curve ball sidearm. This makes it

easy for the batter to know what pitch is coming, and he is prepared to hit the ball. Successful pitchers do not telegraph their pitches. A pitcher should never waste a change-up. The slow velocity of such a pitch gives the batter time to check his



If you vary your normal pitching motion for a change of pace, you will fool no one.

swing and let the pitch go by for a ball. If a runner happens to be stealing on the change-up pitch, he gains precious running time, for the slow velocity of the ball delays the catcher's throw to the base.

Curve Ball. In addition to using the same motion for every pitch, the pitcher should hold the ball in almost the same manner every time if he can. The ball has to be held differently to throw the curve ball, but the grip does not have to vary too much from the fast ball grip. Some pitchers hold the ball across the four seams for a fast ball and across two seams for a curve ball. As one progresses and plays a faster brand of baseball, it is possible that an opposing coach or player will know what is coming by the way a pitcher grips the ball. When the ball is

gripped across the two seams, a lot more of the white of the ball is visible to an alert observer.

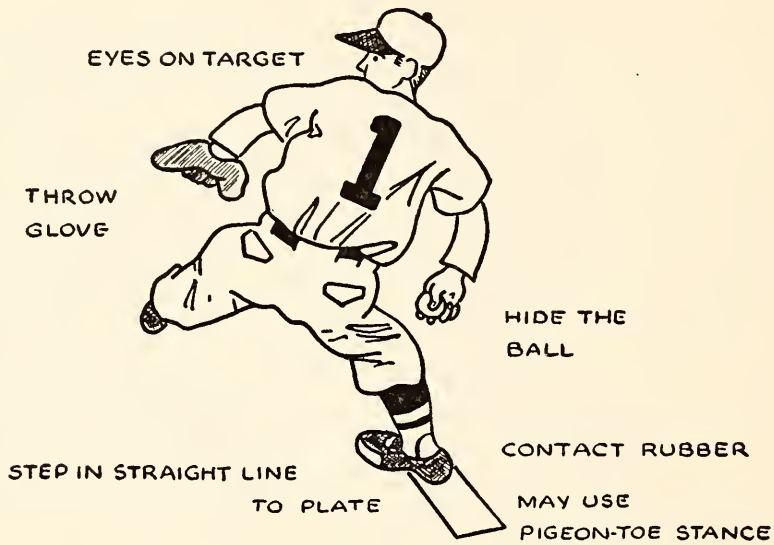
The curve ball can be held in almost the same manner as the fast ball. Just turn the ball slightly, so that the middle finger and/or the thumb catches a seam on the ball. In throwing the curve ball, the index and middle fingers are close together. Most of the work is done with the middle finger and thumb. However, as the ball is released, the wrist is snapped downward and the ball comes over the whole index finger, propelled by the middle finger and thumb. The thumb leaves the ball last, and the wrist snap and action of the middle finger and thumb cause a forward rotation of the ball in contrast to the backward rotation of the fast ball. This forward spin causes the ball to curve.

Change of pace on the fast ball.

There has been some controversy as to whether the ball actually curves or if such phenomenon is merely an optical illusion. No attempt will be made to debate this point; we will assume that the ball curves. Sometimes the term *drop* has been used to denote a vertical curve, as opposed to a horizontal curve or a vertical-horizontal curve. The term *curve* includes the drop. A pitcher may have a curve ball that's similar to a ball "rolling off a table," or one that appears that way to the batter.

Curve Ball Change-Up. The change-up curve is held in the same manner as the regular curve ball. The pitcher wants the ball to come up to the plate slower than his regular curve. To accomplish this, he "takes something off" his regular pitch. He lets up on the power with which he throws the ball, although

his motion is the same as for his regular curve ball or any other pitch. He does not ease up on his delivery. Experience and practice aid in developing this change-up. If a pitcher has difficulty with this pitch, he can try choking or smothering the ball more.



Beginning the pitch.

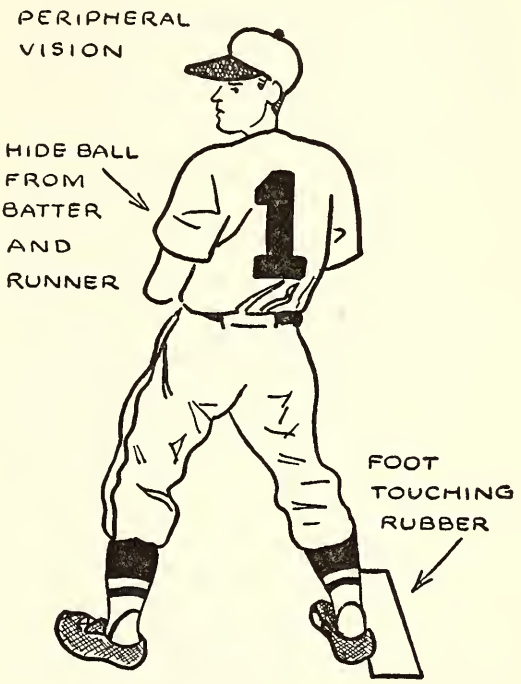
A player can hurt his arm if he experiments with freak pitches. The slider, palm ball, screwball, knuckleball, and other such deliveries are for the experienced pitcher. As a pitcher grows older and plays in faster company, it may be advisable for him to develop an extra pitch. When a pitcher starts to lose his fast ball, he has to depend on experience and guile to win, and he resorts to unusual deliveries. If a young player can master the four pitches described and develop control of each pitch, he will be difficult to beat.

Set Position

When there are men on base, the pitcher naturally has to assume a set position rather than a windup position. The only time this rule is violated is when the defensive team is way ahead and the pitcher wants to concentrate on the batter and doesn't

care if the runner scores or not. Some pitchers are more effective when throwing from a windup position.

The proper position of the feet for the set position was described on page 69. In this position, the pitcher stretches, brings his hands down to a stop, looks at the baserunner, and either throws to the base, steps off the rubber, or sights his target and pitches to the batter. The pitcher may look at the baserunner, look at the plate, and then look at the baserunner again. He can do this as often as he wants. However, the batter may step out of the box if the pitcher unnecessarily delays the game.



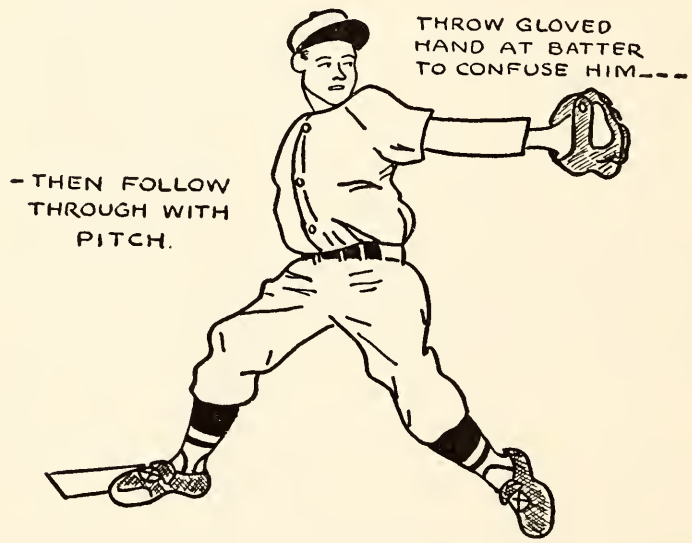
In the set position.

Position of Teammates

A pitcher never should throw a ball to the batter while any defensive player is out of his normal position for that particular hitter. There is one exception to this rule, and that is when a bunt is in order. The defensive alignment is different when a bunt is expected.

Some pitchers will throw to the batter while an infielder is returning to his position after having bluffed the baserunner back to the bag, or while an outfielder is slowly returning after fielding a long-hit ball. A pitcher sometimes throws to the batter before the defense has deployed its forces the way it desires. Many times a defense will overshift on a certain hitter. For a strong right-handed pull hitter, the third baseman is apt to shift toward the left-field foul line and deep, the shortstop moves to-

ward the hole between third and short, and the second baseman moves over behind the keystone sack or to the left-field side of it. The first baseman may move slightly toward second base, but he has to remain in a position to receive a throw from one of the other infielders, in the event they field a ground ball. Each outfielder will shift toward his right for such a hitter. *It is the pitcher's responsibility to wait until each player is in proper defensive position before he begins his pitching motion.*



If you're a right-handed pitcher, this is how you'll look just before you throw the ball.

Keeping Runners on Base

When the pitcher is throwing to a base, he is doing so to keep the baserunner "honest." The pitcher would like to pick the runner off base, but the most important thing is to prevent the runner from getting too big a lead. A runner who has a large lead can steal a base, take an extra base on a base hit, break up a double play, make the defense settle for an out at first instead of a force out, or play havoc with the defense in other ways.

With a runner on first base, the pitcher should use "peripheral vision"; that is, he should watch the runner out of the corner of

his eye. Although his body is at a right angle to the plate and he has his back toward first base, the pitcher's head is turned toward the batter, and he can see the first baseman on the bag out of the corner of his eye. If the pitcher cannot see the runner by use of this split vision, then the runner has too big a lead. The pitcher should throw the ball to the first baseman to try to catch the runner or at least make him more cautious so that he will lessen his lead. It is not always necessary for the runner to have a large lead to be trapped off base. Sometimes, when the runner is leaning toward second base, a quick throw will get him before he can regain his balance and return to first base. If the pitcher changes the amount of time between his deliveries, he throws both the runner and batter off stride. When the hitter is anxious to hit with runners on base, it is wise for the pitcher to make him wait. This increases the chances of his swinging at a bad ball.

Step flat-footed and in a straight line towards the plate. Step in the same spot and stride the same distance every time.

The Pitch-Out

A *pitch-out* is a deliberate waste ball that the batter cannot possibly reach. The catcher signals for such a pitch and steps from behind the plate to the outside so that he can catch it. The purpose of the pitch-out is to let the catcher handle the ball cleanly and without interference from the batter, so that he can throw a runner out attempting to steal, break up a hit-and-run

play, pick a man off base, or nab the runner coming home on a squeeze play. The pitcher has to make sure that the batter cannot possibly hit the ball, and he throws it to the outside of the plate.

Imagine stepping in a straight line when you pitch.

A cardinal sin for a pitcher is to get the pitch-out close enough to the plate to have the batter hit the ball. Because a pitch-out must reach the catcher quickly, so that he can throw it or get a runner coming home, most pitch-outs are fast balls.

Here are some typical pitch-out situations: (a) With a runner on first base, the catcher thinks the hit-and-run play is on; (b) in a bunt situation, with a runner on first base and the defense in bunt position, the first baseman running in and the second baseman darting behind the baserunner to take a throw from the catcher; (c) with a runner on third base and a definite bunt threat present.

Picking Runners Off Base

Many times a young pitcher will take one look at the runner and then throw to the batter. A smart runner will note this and

be off for second the moment the pitcher turns his head to pitch. *A pitcher should not be reluctant to take a second, and sometimes a third, look at the runner.* When throwing to first base, the right-handed pitcher pivots on his right foot, makes a quarter turn to the left, stepping toward first base with the left foot and throwing to first base. Once the pitcher makes any motion to first base, however slight, he has to throw the ball or a balk will be called. The pitcher should try to throw the ball about knee high and to the inside part of the bag. This enables the first baseman to handle the throw easily and be in a position to tag the runner getting back to the base.

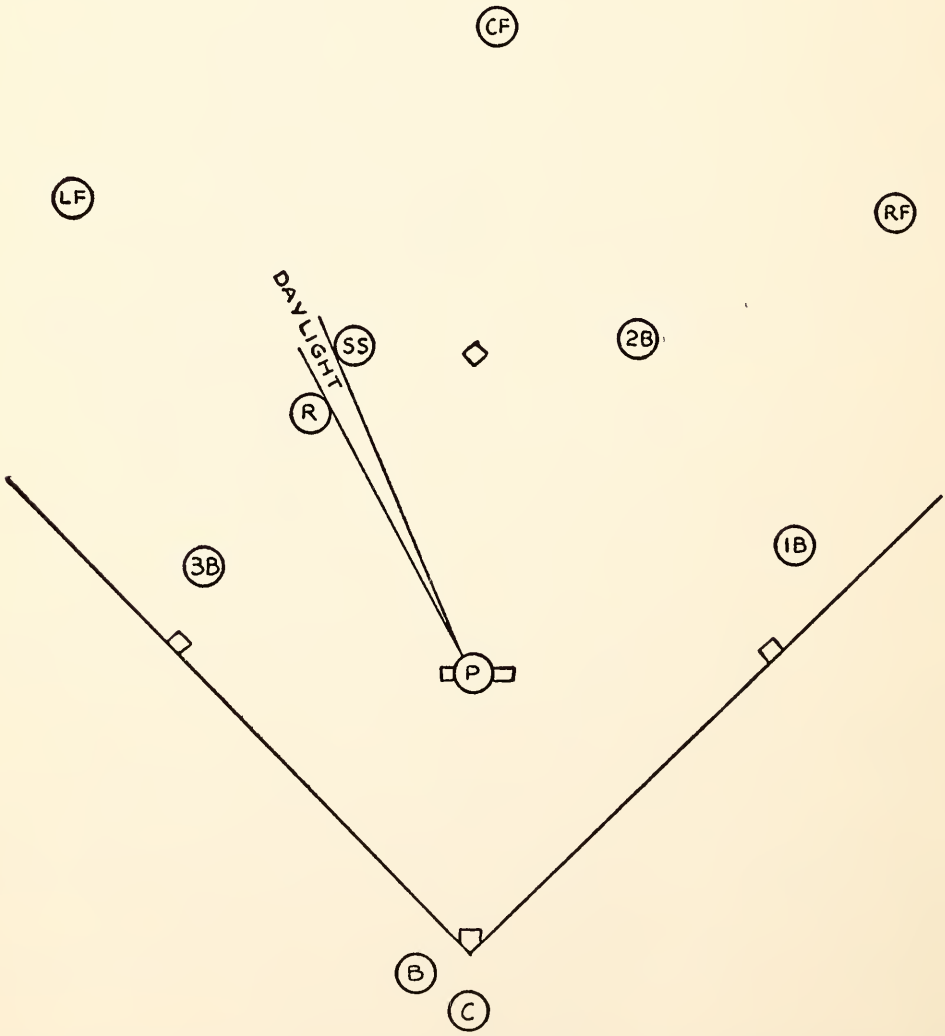
For a pick-off at second, imagine a line and step on or past it. Use 180-degree turn.

If the pitcher does not want to throw to the first baseman but still does not want to throw to the catcher, he may step off the rubber. The proper way to do this to avoid committing a balk is for the pitcher to raise his right foot and place it back behind the rubber. When the pitcher is in this position, astride the rubber, he can do practically anything he wants without fear of balking. He is regarded as an infielder when in this position.

If there is a runner on second base, the pitcher should attempt to pick him off in the manner described here.

The Daylight Play. The pitcher assumes his set position. He looks back over his right shoulder at the baserunner, also noting his shortstop's position. The daylight play must have the short-

stop closer to second base than the runner, not the reverse. If the pitcher gets a prearranged signal from the shortstop or notes that there is daylight between the shortstop and the baserunner, the play is automatically on. If the pitcher looks back and finds the shortstop directly behind the runner, the shortstop gives a signal indicating the play is off—otherwise the play is on. A clenched fist or some other simple sign may tell the pitcher that the play is off.



The "daylight" play. A pick-off should be attempted when the runner is far enough away from second to let "daylight" in between himself and the shortstop.

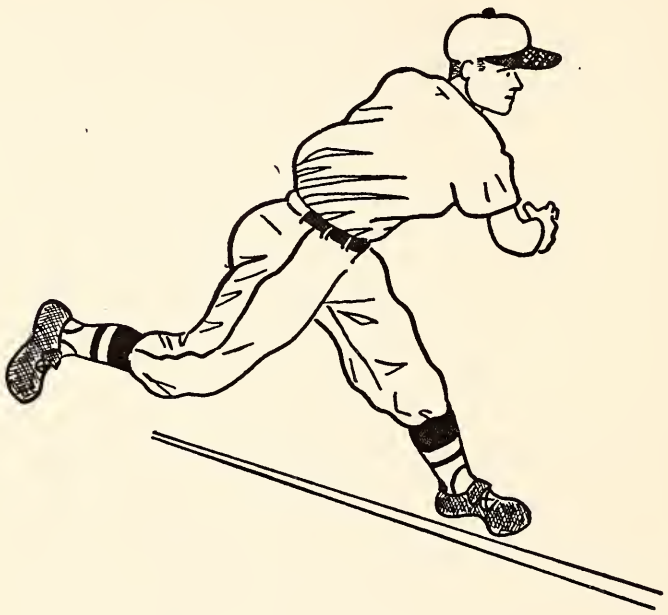
If the play is on, the pitcher turns toward the batter (a count may be used for timing purposes), then whirls and throws the ball to the shortstop. The important thing for the pitcher to do in order to fool the baserunner is to whirl correctly. After the pitcher has received his signal from the shortstop and turned toward the batter, he whirls to his left, makes at least a 180-degree turn with his left foot, and fires the ball to second base. The reason the pitcher turns to his left is that the runner is looking at the hurler's back and does not realize the pitcher is spinning toward second base as soon as he would notice it if the moundsman spun the opposite way. Turning to his left also enables the pitcher to throw to second with his full, normal, pitching motion.

If the pitcher whirled to his right, the runner would be aware of the pitcher's intentions, because he would be facing him. By turning to his right, the pitcher has to stop his motion and reverse himself in order to throw to second base. This is a more difficult maneuver than whirling to the left and throwing in the same motion.

The pitcher makes this half turn so that he will be facing second base and not right field. Facing second base prevents the pitcher from throwing across his body and gives him better control of the ball, the same as when pitching to the plate. In practice, to make sure the pitcher makes a half turn, draw a line from his right foot, which is on the rubber, toward second base. When the pitcher whirls, his left foot should be on this line, or to the left-field side of the line.

The pitcher should throw the ball about knee high and to the third base side of second base, for this permits the shortstop to handle the ball easily and be in position to make the tag. This is a much more difficult play for the shortstop than a similar play for the first baseman, because the shortstop has to run in one direction, catch the ball and reverse himself to tag the runner. The first baseman is, of course, already on the bag when there is a man on first only. If the pitcher whirls to throw to second

base and finds that the shortstop is not covering the bag, he does not have to throw the ball. It is almost impossible to commit a balk when attempting a pick-off at the keystone sack.



Always step in a straight line towards home plate.

Other Pick-Off Plays. If the second baseman covers the bag and the pitcher thinks he has a chance of getting the runner, he whirls the same way but throws the ball immediately, without counting. The runner is usually more alert to the second baseman than the shortstop, because the second baseman is in his field of vision. The runner ordinarily relies on the third base coach to warn him of the position of the shortstop.

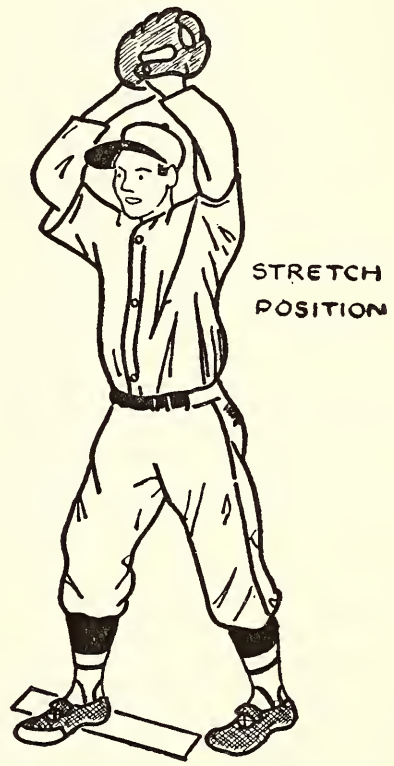
Throwing To Third Base

A right-handed pitcher who desires to throw to third base from a set position finds this to be a simple maneuver, for he is already facing third base and just steps toward the base as he throws.

When a pitcher comes to his set position and finds the base-

runner has committed himself by breaking toward the next base, he should do the following:

Find out what the baserunner is going to do. If the runner broke from first base is he going to continue to second base, is he trying to regain first base, is he stopping to see what the pitcher's next move will be? If the runner continues toward second base, the pitcher just throws the ball to the shortstop or second baseman, whoever is covering the bag. If the runner tries to get back to first base, the pitcher throws the ball to the first baseman. However, if the runner stands midway between first and second base waiting for the pitcher to commit himself, the pitcher, who is in his set position, just steps back off the rubber with his right foot, and then runs directly at the runner. The runner then has to make a break for either first or second base and the pitcher throws accordingly. If the pitcher does not force the runner to commit himself but throws to first or second base, the runner breaks for the opposite base. The ball then has to go from the pitcher to an infielder to another infielder while the runner is covering a distance of approximately forty-five feet. Such a procedure will result in a very close play, and the runner may be safe. The responsibility for the play rests with the pitcher. The procedure a pitcher follows when a runner commits himself at second or third base is similar to the one used when a runner is at first.



Right-handed pitcher in the stretch position. The ball is hidden.

With a runner on third base, with runners on second and

third, or with the bases loaded, the pitcher may use his windup or throw from a set position. He normally uses his windup, unless the runner on third base is an exceptional baserunner or there is a definite steal situation (tie score, weak hitter, late inning, two out, etc.).

Pitching from the stretch. Don't forget to hide the ball!

It is important for the pitcher not to wind up when the bases are loaded, two out, and the count three and two on the hitter. If he does, the runners will get such large leads that it might be possible for the runner from first to score on an ordinary single or the runner from second to score on an infield hit. The pitcher is giving up extra runs that could be averted if he threw from his set position in this situation.

Covering First Base

In order to help himself as much as possible, *a pitcher must learn to become a good infielder.* In addition to being in position to field a ball after he has thrown it to the batter, fielding bunts, ground balls, and certain pop flies, a pitcher has to learn how to cover first on balls hit to the right side of the infield, and how to back up bases on relays from the outfield. A pitcher can hurl great ball and then kick his game away by some mental lapse. There is no excuse for a pitcher to fail to cover first base or back up a base, unless he falls off the mound and breaks his leg.

The pitcher runs over to cover first base on any ground ball or line drive hit between first and second base, and on any pop fly that the first baseman ordinarily would field or would attempt to field. If the first baseman is drawn out of position

when fielding a ground ball or knocking down a line drive, the only player in a position to beat the runner to first base is the pitcher. He must get in the habit of covering first base. If the pitcher doesn't start for first base as soon as the ball is hit, he has little chance of beating the runner to the bag. The pitcher should run in an almost straight line, directly toward first base. He does not run toward the foul line and then parallel to the

Pitcher's fielding position as seen from the plate.

foul line toward the base. He wants to get to the base as soon as possible, and the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. However, the pitcher should not cross the bag into foul ground, for the runner may run into him, and he also would not be in position to make a play at any other base. So the pitcher runs almost directly toward the bag but slightly toward the home plate side, takes the throw from the first baseman, tags the inside of the bag with his right foot to avoid the runner, stops, and pivots to his left as soon as he can, ready to make a play on any other runner.

If there had been a runner on second base also, the pitcher certainly wouldn't want him to score on an infield out. And that's just what would happen if the pitcher continued running down the right-field foul line after he caught the ball. The first

baseman makes the pitcher's job easier if he gets the ball to him before he reaches the bag. If it's possible to do this, the pitcher doesn't have to catch the ball and tag the base at the same time. He catches the ball and then has an opportunity to locate the bag and tag it.

Fielding Bunts

The pitcher must be able to field bunts, for if he can't, he can expect the bunt offense from the opposition. He has to be in position to field the ball after he completes his pitch, with feet parallel, weight on the balls of the feet, and ready to move in any direction. *The proper way to field a bunt is to use two hands whenever possible.* The glove acts as a shovel, and the bare hand scoops the ball into it. Both hands come up toward the right shoulder, and the right foot is quickly planted so that the pitcher may push off it and make a fast throw to the desired base. If the pitcher is throwing to first base, he throws to the inside of the bag, so that the first or second baseman has a clear view of the ball at all times, and so that it will not hit the runner or be obscured by his body.

Step in a straight line to prevent throwing across the body.

When throwing to second base, the pitcher usually has a longer throw, and the shortstop may not be in position to catch it by the time the pitcher releases the ball. The pitcher should throw directly to the bag and expect the infielder to be there by the time the ball arrives. A runner going into second base has a lead before he starts and, with the longer throw involved, the play at this

base is usually much closer than at first base. If the pitcher gets the ball to second quickly, there is a possibility that the batter may be doubled at first base.

In throws to third base, the pitcher and the third baseman must be in accord. The pitcher does not want to whirl and fire the ball to third and find nobody there. If the bunt is fairly hard and down the third base line, so that the third baseman has to field it, the pitcher, who also is coming over to field the ball, should duck or drop out of the way so that the third baseman can throw the ball to first or second base without obstruction. If the pitcher can field the bunt, he should get the front runner if possible, whirling and throwing to the third baseman who remains on the base. Whether he turns to the right or left depends upon how he fields the bunt. The use of the voice by the catcher, pitcher, or third baseman can do much to avoid confusion. However, the defense should be sure that they are not listening to the voice of the opposing coach or baserunner when making the play.

If the catcher can field the bunt, the pitcher lets him do so, because the catcher is in a better position to see the play, which is in front of him. Sometimes the catcher directs the pitcher where to throw the ball, but the decision rests with the pitcher if he fields it, and he must assume responsibility for making the proper play.

On certain plays, where the pitcher, catcher, and first or third baseman converge on the ball, it is necessary for someone to take charge in order to avoid a collision. Who fields the

Left-handed pitcher in the stretch position.

bunt depends upon where the ball is bunted and the various fielding skills of the defensive players. The use of the voice is important, and there should be an understanding among the defensive players to know the difference between (I) "got it" and (You) "take it," or the use of a player's name. After the bunt has been fielded, all bases must be covered, to prevent baserunners from taking advantage of an unprotected base.

Backing Up Bases

The pitcher must back up the correct base on all balls hit to the outfield. The throw from the outfielder or the relay from an infielder may get past the third baseman or catcher, allowing the batter and other runners to score, or advance extra bases. With a runner on first base and a ball hit to rightfield or centerfield, the pitcher should back up third base. If the throw gets through the third baseman, the pitcher should be in a position to retrieve it, to prevent the runner from scoring and the batter from advancing to second base. With a runner on second base, or runners on first and second, the pitcher should back up the catcher on a ball hit to the outfield, in case of a wild throw. When backing up bases, the pitcher should stand at least twenty feet, and possibly more, behind the base. If the pitcher is too close to his teammate and the ball gets by him, it will get by the pitcher also, and everybody will score.

A southpaw taking signs. Don't let the man on base, the batter, or the opposing team's coach see the ball.

Poise

It is important for a pitcher to develop poise. The successful pitcher has to be in command of the situation at all times. Naturally, there will be difficult situations he will have to face. Batters are going to get base hits off him, he will walk a few men, and teammates are going to commit errors.

These are all part of the ball game. The pitcher who is only a front runner, and who complains about the weather, the umpire, the mound, and all the little things that go into pitching, is usually not very popular or very successful. Every pitcher is going to get knocked out of the box some time during his career. The "breaks" of the game even up. For every dribbler that squirts through the infield, every pop fly that drops out of reach, and every topped ball (swinging bunt), there is a line drive caught, a hard-hit ground ball deflected by the pitcher to some infielder, or a great play by a defensive player. The only trouble is that the pitcher has no control over these events and doesn't know what is going to happen. That is what makes baseball such a great game—the uncertainty of it.

A right-handed pitcher taking signs. He has the ball well-hidden.

Poise can come through experience. The veteran pitcher will not be rattled by the base on balls, the dancing baserunner, an apparent bad call by the umpire, or the "riding" he gets from the opposition. Any player, particularly a pitcher or batter, who has "rabbit ears" is going to take a merciless riding from the rival team. Anyone who is visibly affected by vocal criticism can expect such treatment every time he gets in a tight situation. The only way to perform under such circumstances is to ignore

the pointed remarks and make the "jockeys" eat their words by giving a good performance. Actions speak louder than words.

Correctable Faults

A young pitcher will have faults. Some are correctable, others are not. A ballplayer may not have the necessary physical equipment to be a pitcher, and if this is the case he should try some other position. However, it may be possible for a young player to *develop* the physique necessary for a pitcher. Many young men have become excellent pitchers through grit and determination, surpassing others who had superior physical ability. (There are many intangible factors involved in the development of a good player, and these are discussed on pages 3-9.)

Some of the correctable faults a pitcher may have are:

1. Taking signs improperly.
2. Poor rotation of the ball.
3. Improper grip on the ball.
4. Not concealing his pitches.
5. Not using the same motion for each pitch.
6. Throwing across the body.
7. Easing the motion for the change-up.
8. Putting the weight on the heel when releasing the ball.
9. Standing on top of the rubber—off balance—falling off the rubber.
10. Poor follow-through.
11. Not bending the back as he delivers the ball.
12. Taking eyes off the target.
13. Not stepping in the same spot on each pitch.
14. Not fielding his position correctly.
15. Permitting baserunners too large a lead.
16. Not covering first base correctly.
17. Not backing up the bases on throws from the outfield.
18. Not making pick-off plays correctly.
19. Pitching when the defense is out of position.
20. Not thinking (probably the most important of all).

6
CATCHING

THE CATCHER IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT PLAYERS ON THE team. He has to know the weaknesses of opposing batsmen, be able to handle all types of pitchers, field his position well, catch difficult foul balls, and be able to throw! A player cannot hope to be a successful catcher if he does not have a strong arm. If the catcher throws poorly, the team is at a tremendous disadvantage. It means that a walk is the same as a two-base hit. If a baserunner can steal second base every time he gets on first, it throws an additional burden on the pitcher, infielder, and outfielder. The runner is in scoring position, the double play possibility no longer exists, and there can be no force play. The pitcher worries about his control and either becomes wild or puts the ball "right down the pipe" and the batter kisses it bye-bye. The catcher's arm also must be accurate, but he can improve this phase of his throwing. He may not be able to increase his velocity or the speed with which he gets the ball away.

The catcher is the "quarterback" of the baseball team. It is his duty to know the batting weaknesses of each member of the opposition and to exploit such weaknesses to his team's best

advantage. The manager or coach of a team does not like to call the pitches for his battery. This procedure curbs a catcher's initiative and weakens the team's confidence in him. The catcher has to be smart, quick to grasp ever-changing situations, and possess the ability to thwart the offense. On all plays where the catcher, who has the play in front of him, can help his teammates by directing the play, he should do so. All the players should be so familiar with his voice that they will not confuse it with someone on the opposing team. There is a play that all infielders, including catchers, can use. This is the dummy play. The catcher knows that the runner has a throw beaten, but in an attempt to get him to slacken his speed or come in standing up instead of sliding, the catcher pretends that the ball is not coming to the plate. He stands quietly by the plate and then suddenly grabs the ball and tags the runner.

Squat Position—Giving Signals

The catcher gives his sign to the pitcher from a squat position. The shortstop and second baseman may be able to read the catcher's sign, but no other player should be able to. It is important that opposing coaches or baserunners be prevented from stealing the catcher's signals. When there is a runner on second base, the catcher will have to use a different set of signs to avoid detection. In the correct squat position, the catcher is on his haunches, feet apart, knees bent, body bent forward, weight equally distributed on the balls of his feet. His left wrist rests on his left knee, and the glove extends beyond this knee and helps hide his signs from the third base coach. Because of this extra protection provided by the glove on his left hand, the catcher may shift his position slightly to his left. This brings his right knee in a more direct line toward the pitcher, preventing the first base coach from stealing the signs. There is no reason why a left-hander cannot be a catcher. He would just reverse this procedure.

The catcher then places his right hand in the crotch formed by his legs and gives his signal. His right hand rests high up his right leg to prevent the on-deck hitter or players in the dugout from stealing the signs. The standard signal for young players is one finger for a fast ball and two fingers for a curve. The fingers may be wiggled for a change-up pitch. However, any

The catcher's squat-position.

set of signals that the catcher desires can be used. Some catchers use a fist for pitch-out. It is better to use only finger signs if possible. The clenching of the fist may be detected by a smart coach, for he may notice the tightening of the muscles in the catcher's forearm.

Sometimes it is necessary for the catcher to use a set of signs other than finger signs. Because of poor weather conditions or bad lights, a pitcher may not be able to see finger signs, and some other system must be devised.

When giving signs with a runner on second base, the catcher has to prevent the runner from stealing the signs and relaying them to the batter. There are various ways for the catcher to do this. He may give three sets of signals, with the correct set for that inning being the first set, the second set, or the third

set, as determined beforehand. The set of signals to be used can be changed each inning. The runner sees three sets of signals and cannot be sure which set is correct.

How you should look to the pitcher. The glove hides signals from third base.

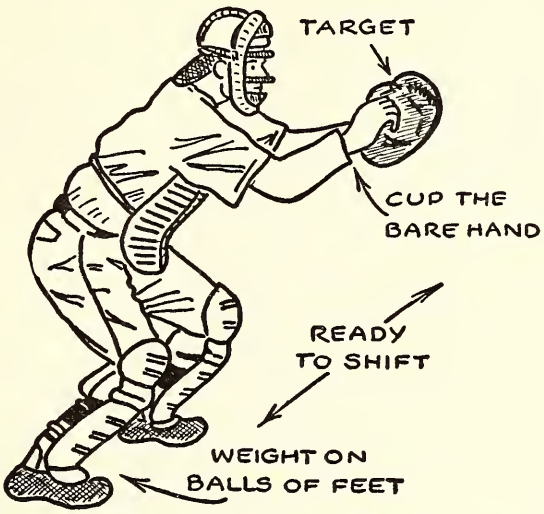
Another system uses the total of all three sets. For example, the fast ball sign may be 4, the curve 5, and the change-up 6. The catcher could give the following signals: 1, 2, 1, fast ball; 2, 2, 1, curve ball; or 2, 3, 1, change-up. With this system, the catcher and pitcher must be sure to add correctly.

Receiving Position

After the catcher gives his sign and is ready to receive the ball, he moves up into a crouch position. A catcher should not stay down in his squat, because it would be difficult to throw while in this position. Even if no one is on base he should assume his crouch, so that he is ready to go after foul balls and field bunts or topped balls. The catcher should offer his glove as a still target for the pitcher and cup his bare hand so that there is less chance of injury from a foul tip. He should bring every pitch that is in the strike zone into his belt buckle. By doing this, he is bringing the ball over the center of the plate, making the umpire's job easier. The umpire can easily see the pitch is a strike and can call it correctly.

The catcher usually catches the ball with the finger section of the glove up and the pocket of the glove facing the pitcher. If the ball is anywhere in the strike zone, he can catch it in this position by moving the glove up or down or from side to side. There is a difference of opinion among some coaches about how

a low strike should be caught. Some think that the glove should be held in the same position, because if the glove is turned around and the finger section is toward the ground, the umpire may be inclined to call the pitch a ball. Others think that the



The catcher's receiving position.

glove should be shifted in this manner so that the catcher may handle the pitch more easily. The catcher should catch low strikes the best way he can. Sometimes a catcher inadvertently tells the opposition what the pitch will be by the position of his mitt. If the glove is held with the fingers up, it is a fast ball. If the glove is held with the fingers down, the pitch is a curve. A curve ball breaks down, and some catchers find it easier to catch such a pitch with the glove in this position, but they should make sure they are not tipping off the pitch to their opponents.

Shifting

If the ball is not in the strike zone, the catcher has to shift to catch it, in order to be in position to throw. *But the catcher should not shift his feet on a borderline pitch.* If he does, he may influence the umpire to call the pitch a ball. Only when the pitch is a definite ball does the catcher shift to catch it. If the

pitch is inside (for a right-hand hitter), the catcher moves his left foot to his left and drops his right foot back so that he is in throwing position. If the pitch is outside, he drops his right foot back and moves his left foot to the right. The left foot is always ahead of the right, so that the catcher can get the ball away quickly.

Don't let your mask hide that pop-foul from you. Throw it far enough away so you won't step on it when you go after the ball.

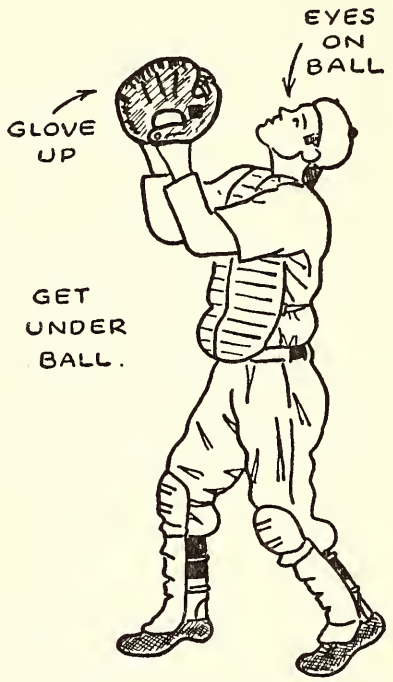
The catcher never crosses his feet. On a pitch-out, he may have to take an additional step—right, left, right—but the left foot doesn't cross the right foot. A boxer step or the step a defensive basketball player uses is correct.

Throwing

The catcher always should use two hands when receiving, if he can. By doing this, he is in position to throw. He just grabs the ball with his right hand, across the four seams if possible, and throws overhand or three-quarters overhand to the base.

Some catchers take too much time in getting rid of the ball, permitting the baserunner to steal, even though the pitcher does not permit a big lead and the catcher has a strong arm.

A catcher may take too long in throwing because he does not shift properly or because he steps to throw. A catcher should take only one step when throwing, and that should be with his left foot. Some catchers take two and even three steps when throwing to a base. This takes too long.

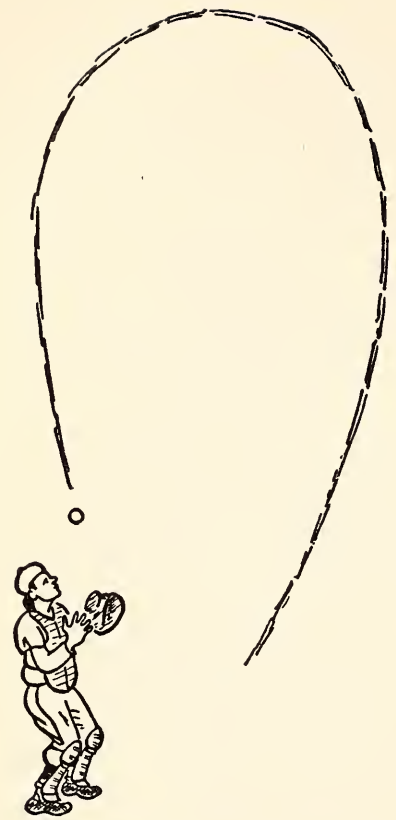


Catching fouls.

A catcher should throw to bases often, not only when a runner is stealing, but when he has a large lead. By doing this, the catcher cuts down on a runner's lead and also keeps the infield awake. The catcher has to be alert to the possibility of a steal. He should not depend on his teammates or bench to warn him of an attempted steal, although both can be helpful. *It is the catcher's responsibility to know where the baserunner is.*

Foul Balls

When catching foul balls, the catcher should realize that many fouls follow an oval (elliptical) path. The ball goes up in the air and then has a tendency to curve back to the plate, like the flight of a boomerang. This is not true of all foul balls; it depends upon the angle the ball hits the bat. However, the catcher should be aware of this possibility, so that he will not overrun a foul ball or have to dive back for a ball he has misjudged. A catcher must practice catching fouls in order to become skillful at it. He should have someone hit him fouls in practice periods.



Many fouls curve back towards home plate.

If there is no one available who can hit foul flies, the catcher should assume his stance and have a fellow player throw "foul balls."

Fielding Bunts

A mistake that catchers frequently make is fielding bunts incorrectly. Some catchers use only the bare hand when picking up a bunt, because they feel it is faster and surer. This is not true. Whenever possible, a catcher should use two hands when fielding. The glove is used as a buffer and the bare hand scoops and grabs the ball as it goes into the glove. There is less chance for a fumble, and the catcher does not have to grope for the ball and have it squirt out of his hand. If the ball is grabbed just with the bare hand, the catcher sometimes has to readjust it with his fingers before he can throw it. When the ball is fielded with two hands, the glove holds the ball so that the catcher can grip it properly the first time. The catcher then throws quickly to the desired base. He can throw in the same manner an infielder would throw; he does not have to straighten up and throw as he does when trying to catch a runner stealing.

Keep your eyes on the ball and use two hands.

Covering Third Base

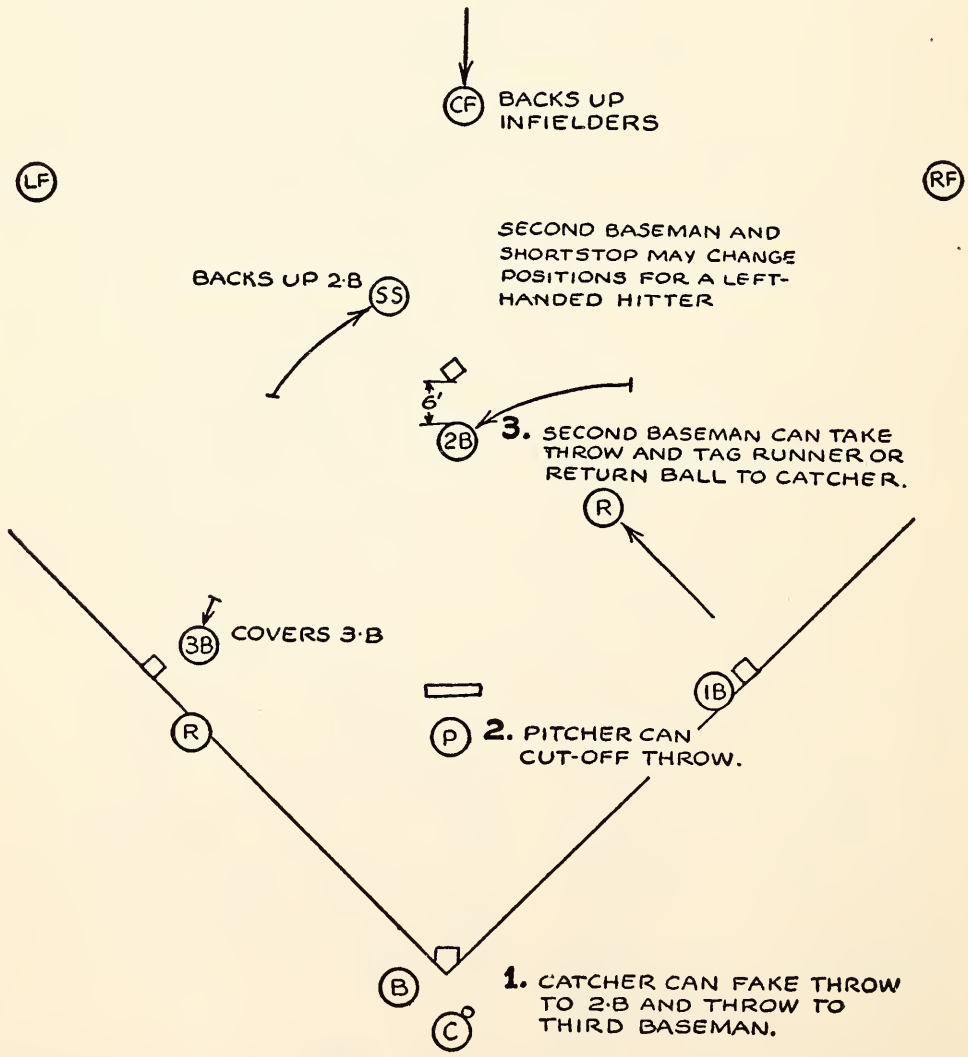
When there is a runner on first base, and the third baseman has to field a bunt and cannot get back to third base quickly, the catcher should continue down the base line and cover the bag. If he does not do this, an alert baserunner will notice that third base is uncovered and go from first to third on a simple sacrifice bunt. The pitcher should not cover the bag, for he might be exposed to the risk of tagging a sliding runner. The third baseman's momentum is carrying him toward the plate while the catcher is going away from the plate toward third base. It is logical for the catcher to proceed to the bag and protect it, because the shortstop is covering second base, the second baseman is covering first base, and the first baseman is charging in to be in fielding position for the bunt.

Tagging

An extremely important phase of catching is *tagging the runner.* The catcher should not block the plate if he doesn't have the ball, but when he does have the ball he should remember that the runner usually comes out second best in a collision. The catcher is protected by his equipment and may have time to set himself for the runner. Many runners take the path of least resistance and attempt to slide around a catcher rather than through him. An intelligent baserunner may slide to the side of the catcher

Hold the ball tightly for a rough tag and be ready to make a play somewhere else.

and tag the plate with his hand as he goes by. The only time a runner may seek collision with the catcher is when the catcher has the ball and is waiting for him. The runner hopes to knock the ball out of the catcher's hand as he collides with him. If the catcher has enough time, he should grip the ball in his bare hand, because he can hold it better and also because he will be ready to throw after the play at the plate if other baserunners become too daring.



Double-steal defense with three options.

Double Steal Options

With runners on first and third base and a double steal in the making, the catcher has several options—he can throw to second base, bluff a throw to second and throw to third base, or throw the ball back toward second and have the pitcher cut it off. If he is going to use the latter option, the catcher must be sure the pitcher knows it. He has to give the pitcher some sort of signal, and to prevent any confusion, the pitcher should give a return sign. Some simple maneuver such as taking off a glove is recommended. If the catcher is throwing to the pitcher or bluffing a throw, he should not look at the runner on third base, but if he is throwing to second base, he should first take a glance at the runner. It does not make any difference where the third-base runner is if the catcher is faking a throw to second base, because there is no danger of him scoring. However, if the catcher throws to second base, the third-base runner presents a definite scoring threat. The catcher looks at the runner before throwing to second to see if the runner has committed himself. If the runner is close to the bag, he may have no intention of attempting to score; if he has a very large lead, he may be picked off by a direct throw to the third baseman. However, if he has a lead which enables him to go either way, he creates a problem, and the catcher can expect a play at the plate after the throw to second.

7

INFIELD PLAY

THE INFIELD INCLUDES THE FIRST BASEMAN, SECOND BASEMAN, third baseman, and shortstop. This quartet is the inner defense and can do much to cut down on the opponents' run production. Every manager likes to be strong "down the middle"—catcher, pitcher, second baseman, shortstop, and center fielder—but he also likes to have a good first baseman, third baseman, left and right fielder. But, if there are not enough good defensive players to fill every position, the better players usually are placed down the middle, because here they have the opportunity to field more chances. In the infield, the shortstop generally handles the most chances, followed by the second, third, and first basemen (thrown balls not included). The keystone duo also has to cover more ground and make plays that require agility and coordination, such as pivoting for a double play.

However, it is not fair to say that one infield position is more important than another; all are difficult to play, although a player may be more successful at one than the others, depending upon his physical attributes. General techniques will be explained, and each infield position will be described, followed by

an explanation of over-all defensive play and what the defense should do in certain situations.

General Procedures

First of all, there are certain procedures that all infielders should follow. Each defensive player must learn as much as he can about the hitter, the runner's speed, the type of pitch that will be thrown, the condition of the field, the structure of the park, and prevailing weather conditions, particularly the sun and the wind. *He must be in the ball game every minute.* Also, each player must be aware of the play situation, number of outs, count on the hitter, score of the game, the inning, and the hundred and one things that go to make up a baseball game. He should watch the flight of the ball to the plate and be able to follow the ball as it comes off the bat. Every player must *anticipate* what he is going to do with the ball if it is hit to him. He has to make certain plays on fly balls, ground balls, hard-hit balls, slow-hit balls, line drives, base hits, bunts, and any other type of ball that may be hit. The defense must be ready!

An infielder is always ready. Notice the slight forward motion.

The infield unit will play in one of three positions—out (back), halfway, or in. The manager or coach designates the position. If the infield is playing back, it is playing in normal depth for the batter. It does not anticipate a play at the plate or a bunt. The infield is back where it can best field a hard-hit ball and is in good position for the conventional double play, second base to first base. The first baseman may be holding a runner on the bag, but all other infielders are deep.

When playing halfway, the infield moves a few steps toward home plate. It expects a possible play at the plate, but

also may make the conventional double play, depending upon where the ball is hit. Sometimes the second baseman or shortstop may "cheat" a little by moving slightly toward the keystone sack. He wants to be able to reach the bag quickly without permitting a ball to be hit through his position.

An infield that is drawn in toward the plate definitely hopes to make a play there. The run is of such importance that it probably means the ball game, and there is no sense in making a play at any other base.

Sometimes one side of the infield may play in while the other side plays back. With runners on first and third base, one out, and a right-handed pull hitter at the plate, the left side of the infield may play back and the right side halfway. A hard hit ground ball to the left side may result in a conventional double play, while a medium-hit ball to the right side may result in a play at the plate.

Try to face a grounder, wait for the peak of the hop, and give your hands plenty of room.

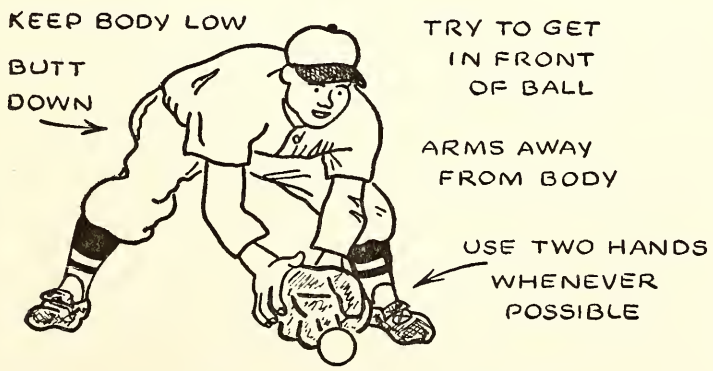
Fielding Position. Each defender has to be in proper fielding position. The usual infielder's position is this—head up, eyes on the ball, weight on the balls of the feet, balanced to go in any direction, butt low, knees slightly bent, and arms away from the body. He may be moving forward *slightly*. The infielder should field the ball in front of him if he possibly can, and every time he can field a ground ball with two hands he should do so. Fielding a ball with two hands allows the infielder to get rid of the ball faster, because it puts him in better position to throw. If the infielder catches the ball with one hand, he must bring this hand into his body or his throwing hand out to the ball, grab the ball with his bare hand, get the proper throwing position, and throw the ball. Besides being in better throwing position if

he catches the ball with two hands, the infielder has less chance of fumbling the ball.

The infielder should keep his elbows and hands away from his body when fielding ground balls. This permits freedom of movement and permits him to field the ball better. If the infielder has plenty of time in which to make the play, he can straighten up to throw the ball. He should never lob the ball to a teammate. However, most infield plays require him to get rid of the ball immediately, and this means that he must be able to throw from almost any position.

The infielder should be able to throw with maximum velocity by taking just one step. It is not necessary to take two or three steps to throw the ball. Some players take a hop, skip, and a jump before releasing the ball and then wonder why they never throw a runner out. On a long throw, the infielder (right-handed) should plant his right foot so that he will be able to get full throwing motion and thus greater velocity in his throw. An example of this would be a shortstop who has to make a long throw to first base from the "hole" between his position and the third baseman. An infielder has to be accurate in his throwing. He cannot have a scatterarm and hope to play much baseball.

Initial Step. The infielder has to play the ball; he cannot let the ball play him. The easiest time to catch a bounding ball is at the peak of the hop or at the short hop. It is difficult to field



Don't let those grounders get away.

the ball in between hops. The infielder must make up his mind how he wants to play the ball and then act accordingly. He should charge most balls.

If the infielder cannot field the ball in front of him but must take it while going to his right or left, he should follow the proper procedure. The initial step should be a cross-over step, for this will give him greater distance at the start and enable him to cover more ground. When an infielder just misses reaching a ground ball, it may be because of a bad start, which curtailed his range. If the ball is hit near the infielder the start is not important, but he should get in the habit of making the proper start to increase his range.

Tagging. During the course of a ball game, the infielder will have to make tag plays. When tagging a sliding runner, *the infielder catches the ball with two hands, puts his glove hand, which contains the ball, down in front of the base, and lifts his bare hand up out of harm's way.* The glove hand is held with the back of the hand away from the runner, the arm slightly bent, and the glove a few inches off the bag. The back of the hand is away from the runner and facing the bag to prevent spiking that part of the hand which is not protected by the glove. The arm is slightly bent and the glove held off the bag, in order to take the shock of the runner coming into the bag. If the arm were held straight, it would not be able to "give" with the force of the slide, and consequently it might be injured. If the glove rested on the bag, the ball could be dislodged by the runner by jamming the glove into the bag. The infielder does not reach for the runner; he looks at the runner's legs to determine which way he is sliding. The infielder

Field the ball, plant your right foot, then make that long throw.

has the bag between his legs, so the runner must come to him.

THE USE OF THE VOICE. Sometimes an infielder can help his teammate by calling to him and informing him where to throw the ball. This frequently occurs when an infielder is taking a throw from the outfield and has his back to the play. In such a

Plant that foot for power on a long throw.

situation, the relay man does not know where to throw the ball and very often whirls and throws to the wrong base or does not throw quickly enough to the correct base. There are times also when two or more players go after the ball and either collide or shy away from it and let it fall for a base hit, because no one called for it. There is no reason for such things to happen, except that members of the defensive team neglect to use their voices.

THE RUNDOWN PLAY. Many young infielders do not make the rundown play properly. This play occurs when a runner has been trapped off base and should be tagged out by the defense. The runner should be run back to the base from which he came.

In other words, he should be made to run the bases clockwise, from home to third, from third to second, or from second to first. If a runner was on second base and got trapped off it, he should be run back to second, not toward third. In case of a fumble or bad throw, the runner regains the base he originally had, but he does not advance. Throws back and forth from the infielders should be kept to a minimum. The infielder who has the ball can fake a throw by making a *full* throwing motion, not just flicking his wrist, and the runner may stop and reverse his path right into the infielder and be tagged out.

In a rundown, a fake must really be a fake. Use a full arm-motion.

If the ball goes from one infielder to another, the throw is not lobbed, neither is it thrown at full speed. It is thrown so that the infielder catching the ball can do so easily. Sometimes, because infielders are afraid of hitting the runner with the ball, they throw it over a teammate's head. If a good baserunner can make a slow infielder chase him all the way to the bag, make a poor throw, drop the ball, or do anything to help him advance or regain his original base, the defense has done an extremely poor job.

Common Faults. Now that the proper infield technique has been explained, let's briefly consider the faults of an infielder. A poor infielder *has no knowledge of the hitter, does not keep his mind on the ball game, does not anticipate, fails to keep his eyes on the ball, and has an improper stance.* His feet may be too far apart, and he does not bend his knees but keeps them "locked"—this keeps his butt too high as he bends to field a ball with his weight back on his heels. He fields the ball one-handed

all the time, fields it too close to his body, fields it on his knees, or fields it on his side when it is possible to field it in front of him.

This poor boy lets the ball play him, straightens up on every throw, steps to throw, has a scatterarm and, of course, takes too long to throw. He likes to count the stitches to make sure that none are broken before throwing the ball. When he has to run

Tagging the runner.

for a ball he fails to use the cross-over step, and he never uses his voice to help a teammate. Mum's the word. To top his performance, he cannot tag properly, and he fails to make the run-down play correctly. And some fellows wonder why they sit on the bench!

The First Baseman

The first baseman is the only infielder who may be either right- or left-handed. All the other infielders must be right-handed, so that they will be in good position to throw the ball to first. A left-handed shortstop or third baseman would have to shift considerably to throw, and a second baseman would not only have this difficulty but would get tangled up in pivoting on a double play. If the bases were run clockwise instead of counterclockwise, it would be advisable for all the infielders except the third baseman to be left-handed. However, more

boys throw right-handed than left-handed, so the layout of the diamond is perfect. Because of this arrangement, a left-handed thrower can only play first base, the outfield, pitch, or possibly catch.

First baseman stretching to his left.

Fielding Position. The left-handed first baseman has a slight advantage, because he can pivot and throw to second and third base more easily than the right-handed player. *There is no other appreciable advantage for either the "portsider" or the orthodox thrower.*

If the first baseman is big, he makes a better target for the other infielders and should be able to reach balls with his foot on the bag that might draw a smaller player off the base. The days of a big, clumsy lout playing first base are over. The first baseman should be agile, well-coordinated, and a good fielder. A good defensive first sacker can do much to hold an infield together.

When the first baseman is taking throws from other infielders, he should run over to the base, contact it with one foot, and assume a straddle position so that he can shift to his right or left to catch the ball and still have his foot on the bag. Only the toe should touch the bag when the first baseman is stretching, so that a greater distance may be covered. If the ball is thrown to the first baseman's right, he moves to his right, keeping his left

foot on the bag. However, if the throw is very wide, the right-handed first baseman should tag the bag with his right foot, cross over with his left foot, and stretch to catch the ball backhanded. This permits him to move farther laterally while keeping contact with the bag.

If the throw is too wide for the first sacker to remain on the base to catch the ball, he must get off the base. Naturally, it is more important for the first baseman to catch the ball, even if he has to leave the bag, than to stand on the bag and let the ball go by him.

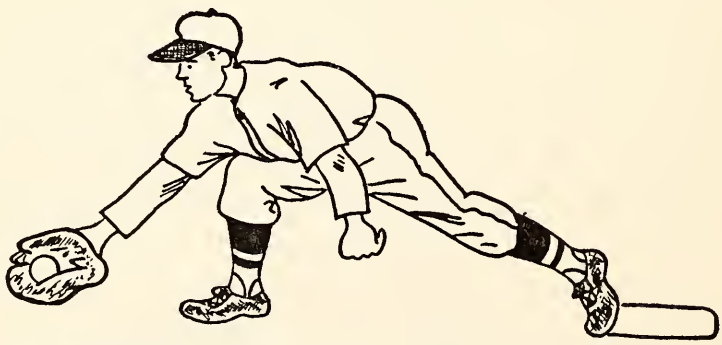
Right-handed first baseman shifting to his left.

If the ball is thrown to the left of the first baseman, he shifts from his straddle position and tags the bag with his right foot. This is true whether or not he has to stretch for the throw. When stretching far to his left, the left-hander uses the cross-over step, tagging the bag with his left foot.

If the first baseman has to jump for the throw or is forced to go to the home plate side of the bag to catch the ball, he should

make every effort to tag the runner as he goes by. A sweeping motion with the glove hand is the quickest way to do this.

Because the first baseman has to stretch for throws and uses a special type of glove, he is permitted to catch balls one-handed if he so desires. The first baseman does not place his hand all the way in the glove like other players do. He often uses the glove as a net or scoop and only sticks his hand about halfway in it. This procedure, and the construction of the glove, give this mitt a better sticking quality when the ball hits it. As long as a first baseman can catch thrown balls one-handed skillfully, there is no need to insist that he use two hands to catch the ball. However, when the play at first base is easy and there is the possibility of a play at another base, the first baseman can use two hands so that he will be in position to throw the ball quickly.



Left-handed first baseman stretching for a low one.

With a runner on first base, it is necessary for the first baseman to stay on the bag to prevent the runner from getting a big lead. The infielder should be on the home plate side of the base. His right foot should be in contact or near the bag, his weight equally distributed on both feet. He should be in a crouch position. This enables him to be in the best position to take a throw from the pitcher or catcher and tag the runner in case a pick-off attempt is made.

Although not recommended procedure for the average team, the following is a play that can be used on occasion. If there is

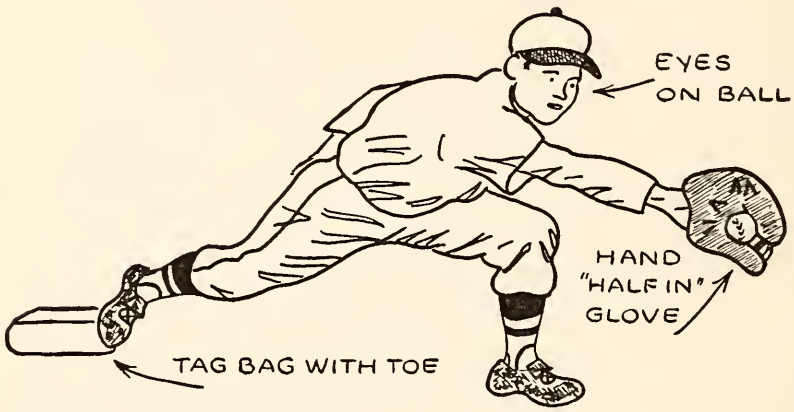
a sure bunt situation and the defense has a big, slow, awkward first baseman and a fast, agile, sure-fielding, strong-throwing second baseman, these two players can quietly switch positions. This tightens up the defense. The second baseman is in position to field the bunt and get the force play, while the big first baseman makes an ideal target at the initial sack to complete the double play or get the batter, if the sacrifice is successful.

Left-handed first baseman pushing off the bag for a high throw.

When the first baseman is taking a throw from the catcher or pitcher who is fielding a bunt or topped ball, he should contact the bag with his left foot and step to the inside of the diamond. This gives him a clear view of the play and allows the ball to be thrown to him without any danger of it hitting the runner. The first baseman is offering a good target for the pitcher or catcher and expects the ball to be thrown to the inside of the diamond. The second baseman assumes this position at first base if the first baseman has to field a bunt, and the play is made the same way.

Force Plays. When the first sacker is fielding bunts, he should *try to take the ball on the right side of his body so he can pivot and throw quickly*. This is particularly true of a right-handed first baseman who is trying to force a baserunner at third or second base. Of course, if the ball is bunted close to the foul line, this will not be possible. Many times the first baseman

will be able to make a force play at second or third base—he, naturally, wants to knock off the front runner if he can. It takes sure fielding, a quick pivot, and a fast, accurate throw to accomplish this. The primary reason that the first baseman charges in is to try for this force out. When fielding a bunt, the



Left-handed first-basemen use "across-the-body" stretch.

player who fields it is responsible for making the decision where to throw it. Some coaches prefer to have the catcher direct the pitcher or first baseman where to throw the ball, but others like to have the fielder make up his own mind.

On a 3-6-3 play, when the first baseman fields a ground ball, throws it to the shortstop, and then runs to first base to get a return throw from the shortstop for the attempted double play, this procedure should be followed: The first baseman fields the ball cleanly, pivots, and rifles a throw to the shortstop, who tags second to force the runner there and relays the ball back to the first baseman. After the first baseman has thrown the ball to second base, he races back to first base, *finds* the bag and then looks for the return throw. *If the first baseman cannot get to first base quickly enough, the pitcher should be there to take the throw from the shortstop.* The second baseman should not attempt to cover first base in such a situation. He is backing up the

first baseman in case the first sacker cannot reach the ball or deflects it. The second sacker would interfere with the first baseman if both were to race to first base. The pitcher is coming from the opposite direction and is supposed to be there anyway.

Pitcher Covering First. On a batted ball to the first baseman, when it is necessary for the pitcher to run over and cover first base, the ball should be thrown softly and as soon as possible. The pitcher should not try to catch the ball and tag the base at the same time. If the first baseman is far from the bag, he will have to make a hard throw to the pitcher. If there is enough time, the first baseman can wait until the pitcher has reached the bag before making his throw.

Cut-Offs. On cut-off plays from the outfield to the catcher, the first baseman goes to a point near the pitcher's mound and lines up the throw from the rightfielder or the centerfielder to home plate. The catcher protects home plate and tells the first baseman whether to let the ball come home or to cut it off and try to make a play at another base. When there is a possibility

This stretch will get you distance.

of getting the runner at the plate, the good throw goes all the way home. If the throw is poor, the first baseman catches it and relays the ball to the catcher. If the runner is going to score anyway, the catcher tells the first baseman to cut off the throw and try to put out another runner.

When there is a man on second base and a single hit by the batter which will score the runner from second easily, there is no point in letting the throw go home while the batter advances to second base on the throw-in. The catcher should tell the first baseman to cut off the throw to prevent the batter from advancing an extra base. If the runner attempts to advance, the first baseman relays the ball to second base and the runner is put out.

When the first baseman is the cut-off man, the third baseman covers third, the shortstop or second baseman takes second, and the pitcher backs up the catcher. The shortstop or second baseman who does not take the bag usually is out of position because he tried to field the ball or has gone out toward right or

Left-handed first baseman shifting to his right.

center field to act as a relay man in case the ball gets by the outfielder. This leaves first base wide open. If the second baseman can cover first while the shortstop takes second, he does so; if he cannot, the batter can take a big lead after he reaches first, without any danger of being picked off. However, he

cannot advance to second if the cut-off play is done correctly.

There are two ways to work a cut-off play when the ball is hit to left field. The first baseman may be the cut-off man, the same as when the throw comes from right or center field, or the third baseman can take the post. If the third baseman is the cut-off man, the first baseman stays at first base, the second baseman covers second base, and the shortstop moves over to protect third base. The pitcher backs up the catcher. The third baseman moves about halfway between third and home. He gets his directions from the catcher and has the same plays to make as the first baseman did—let the throw go through, relay it to the catcher, or cut it off to make a play at another base. If the layout of the diamond is such that the pitcher does not have room to back up the catcher, he can cover first base when the first baseman acts as the cut-off man. This prevents the runner from rounding first and getting a big lead.

Left-handed first baseman in backhand stretch—coach's view.

The Second Baseman

The second baseman and the shortstop play a very vital role for the defense. It is important that they become familiar with

each other's actions and mannerisms. It's advisable to have these two players warm up together and practice together whenever possible. The teamwork between them has to be well-coordinated to perform the double play and other acrobatic maneuvers. These players usually are not the two best hitters on the team, but they usually are the two best fielders of ground balls.

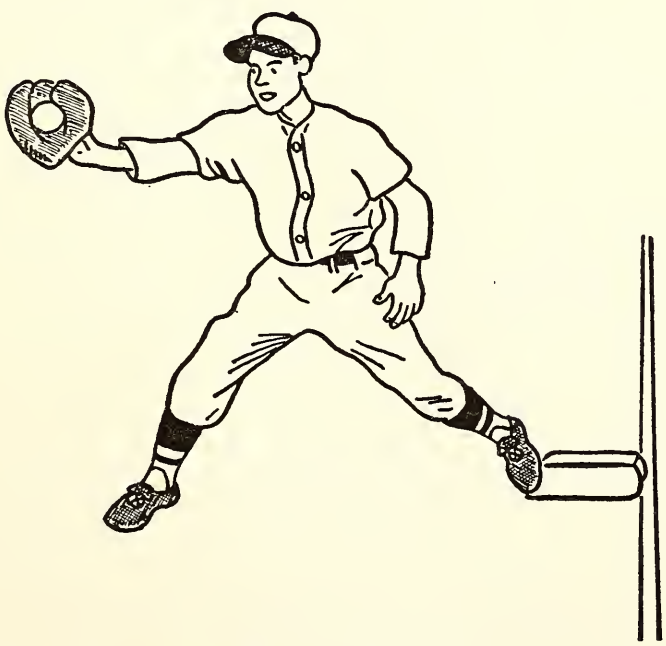
Pivot Plays. The second baseman has to be able to make the pivot on the double play. He cannot do this the same way every time, because each situation will be different. The ball will be hit at different speeds, the runners' speeds will vary, and the ball will come from different angles, so no two plays will be the same. Therefore, the second baseman must know how to pivot several different ways and be able to pivot with either foot. The second baseman should get to the bag as quickly as possible and wait for the ball there. This gives him the opportunity of

Pivot-man is always ready for a poor throw.

locating the bag with his feet and then taking the throw. *He should not try to time the play so that he arrives at the base the same time the ball does.* Close plays will occur all too frequently. The second baseman should expect the shortstop to

throw the ball at his face. Such a throw is easy to handle, and it helps put the second baseman in position to get rid of the ball quickly.

Two of the second baseman's tags with the left foot will be explained. If the play occurs so that the second baseman has to step back off (toward right field) the bag to make his pivot, he does so by pushing off the base with his left foot, stepping back on his right foot, and making his throw. By stepping back he will make it difficult for the runner to interfere with the play. The infielder may leap into the air as he completes his throw to avoid the sliding runner. If the second baseman is going to make the pivot by going forward (toward left field), he drags his left toe over the bag, comes down on his right foot, steps and pivots on his left foot, and throws the ball. As he is completing this pivot he may follow through with a sort of shot-put motion (switching or "scissoring" the feet). This maneuver should bring him clear of any runner.



Be a good target and don't worry about the runner. This is the way the pitcher, catcher, and third baseman should see you.

There are other ways to pivot, and the second baseman can also tag the bag with his right foot. *The main idea is not to step in the base path directly in front (first base side) of second base.* If a second baseman does this, he is at the runner's mercy on a close play. Sometimes an acrobatic second baseman can pivot in mid-air. Any way that he can make the play without being hurt or upset is all right, but he must get the ball away quickly.

Double Steal Defense. When there is a first and third double steal situation and the catcher is going to throw the ball through to second base, only one infielder should take the throw. Whether the second baseman or shortstop will cover the bag depends upon which side of the plate the hitter swings from, whether he is a pull hitter or late hitter, and the type of pitch he receives. Most of the time, the second baseman covers the bag on a steal when the hitter is right-handed, and the shortstop covers when the hitter is left-handed.

When moving to the side, use the cross-over step.

The correct procedure is for the infielder covering the bag to get five or six feet in front of the base. The throw comes to him, and if the runner on third base breaks for the plate, he fires the ball home; if this runner remains on third, the infielder

backs up and makes the tag at second base. If the runner coming into second base pulls up between first and second, the infielder runs him back toward first base (see rundown), aware that the runner on third may break to the plate. The shortstop or second baseman who is not making the play goes behind second base (toward center field) to back up his teammate in case the catcher makes a bad throw.

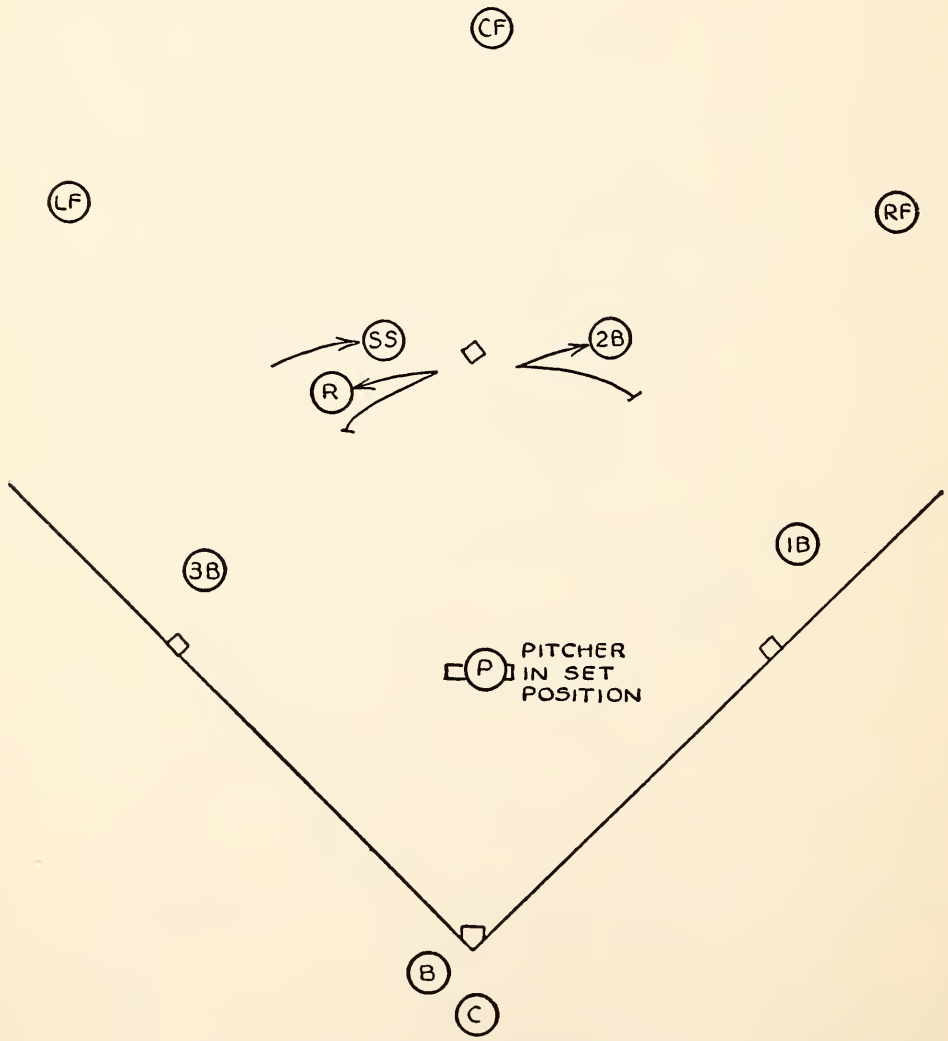
The *improper way* to defend against the double steal is to have the second baseman go between second base and the pitcher's mound while the shortstop covers second base. In this play, the shortstop then tells the second baseman to catch the ball and throw it home or let it go all the way through. This play confuses everybody except the baserunners, who go merrily on their way. If the defense does not work the play successfully, each player has an alibi, "I didn't hear you," "I thought you said . . . ," "I thought the runner was . . . ," and far, far into the night. When this play is used, there is no one to back up the shortstop except the center fielder, and by the time he gets the ball there is one run in and a runner on third. It is much better to delegate the responsibility to one player and let him decide what to do with the ball.

The second baseman has to play alert, "heads up" ball all the time. When there are base runners on first and second base and the shortstop fields a slow-hit ball and forces the runner at second, there often is no possibility of doubling the batter at first. In this situation, the second baseman should be alert to a play at third base. Many runners round third base and then pick up the play; some even try to score from second on a double play. If the second baseman

Moving to your right or left, push off with one foot. Keep your eyes on the ball.

relays the ball to the third baseman, the runner may be tagged as he overruns the bag.

Feint Play. The keystone combination can work together in picking runners off second base. When the runner has taken his lead, the second baseman feints going to the bag and draws the runner back to the base. As the second baseman retraces his steps back to his original position, the runner again assumes his



Feint play: 1. The second baseman moves toward the bag. 2. The runner goes toward the bag. 3. The second baseman returns to his position. 4. The runner resumes his lead. 5. The shortstop breaks for the bag.

lead, keenly aware of the second baseman. As the runner lengthens his lead, the shortstop suddenly breaks for the bag, catches the runner leaning toward third base, takes a throw from the pitcher, and tags the runner. This play requires perfect timing by the defensive players.

Game Situations. On a long-hit ball into the right field corner or between the right and center fielders, the second baseman must go out to the outfield to relay the ball to home plate, third, or second base. *A relay via the second baseman is much quicker than an attempt by the outfielder to throw the ball all the way to the base.* When his back is to the infield, the second baseman should expect to hear from his shortstop, who is covering second base. When the shortstop has to go out for a relay from the left or center fielder, the second baseman should tell him where to throw the ball.

When there is a bunt situation and the first baseman is charging in to field the ball, the second baseman must cover first base. He also covers first base in the same manner when there is a bunt situation and the catcher calls for a pitch-out and attempts to pick the runner off first.

It is important for the second baseman to back up the shortstop or any other teammate whenever he can. If first base is open and the pitcher is deliberately walking the hitter, the second baseman or shortstop should back up the pitcher while the other player covers the middle sack.

The Shortstop

Pick-Off Plays. Because the shortstop plays next to the second baseman and the teamwork between these two is extremely important, this position will be considered next. In addition to the general infield procedure already described, the shortstop has his own special plays to make. The daylight pick-off play (p. 85) and the second baseman "feint" play (p. 128) have already been explained. The shortstop may also use a count play

to catch the runner off second base. As the pitcher looks back at the runner, the shortstop gives him a signal. The pitcher and the shortstop each count off three seconds—one thousand one, one thousand two, one thousand three—and the pitcher whirls and throws to the shortstop covering the bag.

Be sure the ball goes where it should go—throw the ball at the pivot man's head.

Cut-Offs. The shortstop acts as cut-off man on throws to third base from the right and center fielders. If the runner on first base goes to third on a single to right center, the shortstop must line the outfielder up with third base. The outfielder then throws the ball at the shortstop's head. If there is a play at third base, the shortstop lets the good throw go by or cuts off a poor throw and relays the ball to the third baseman. If the runner reaches third easily, the shortstop cuts off the throw to prevent the batter from advancing to second base. The shortstop can rifle a throw to the second or first baseman, depending upon the position of the batter after he rounds first base. If there is no play available, the shortstop returns the ball to the pitcher.

Fielding Slow-Hit Balls. One of the most difficult plays for the shortstop or any other infielder is to field a slow-hit ground ball when playing back in normal depth. *The shortstop should make the play with two hands if he possibly can.* He charges the ball at full speed, catches it, throws to first base *without* straightening up, and continues his forward momentum. He does not stop and set himself to throw the ball, because he can get rid of the ball faster if he throws while on the run. The throw is a comparatively short one, and the infielder must get rid of the

ball as quickly as possible, because the runner is high-tailing it to first base. The second baseman and third baseman should also field slow hit balls in this manner.

The bare-hand grab and running throw is used as a last resort. This is a do or die attempt to nip the runner at first and is an extremely difficult play to make. The infielder throws while on the run and without straightening up in this maneuver also.

The Long Throw. On a long throw of a hard-hit ball, the shortstop should follow the procedure explained earlier in this chapter. After he has fielded the ball, he plants the right foot in order to get maximum power, for the ball has to go a long way. The snap of the wrist, lob throw usually will not beat the average runner to first base. The shortstop does not have to straighten up to throw, but he usually does, because he will get greater power in his throw.

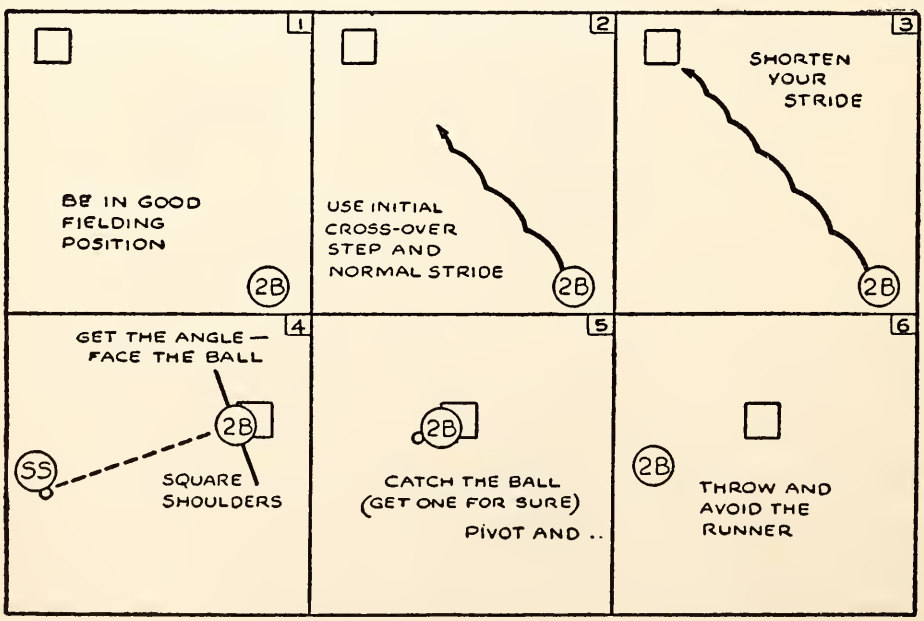
For distance, use the cross-over backhand stretch.

When there is a runner on first base and a ball hit in the "hole" between the third baseman and shortstop is fielded by the latter, the second baseman can help him out. The second baseman should tell the shortstop where to throw the ball, to second or first base, and he should do this before the shortstop's feet are in position for the throw. This will enable the shortstop to prepare himself for his throw, because he knows to what base he is going to throw. The shortstop is delaying his throw

if he gets in position to throw to second base, fields the ball, and looks up at the keystone sack, only to find the runner already there. He must then shift his feet to throw to first base.

Such a procedure can result in the batter being safe instead of out. It is possible also that the runner on first base may stumble on his way to second, and the shortstop will have a play at that bag. The second baseman, who should know the relative positions of both runners, should inform the shortstop where to throw the ball. The third baseman does not do this, because he is trying to cut the ball off before it gets to the shortstop. If he is successful, his play is usually to second base.

Double Plays. Sometimes the second baseman or shortstop can field the ground ball near the bag, tag second, and throw to first base for the double play without relaying to the other guardian of the keystone sack. This may be quicker on some ground balls, and it eliminates the possibility of a fumble or difficult pivot. On such a play, the infielder usually beats the runner to the bag easily, and he has time to step on the base,



Double-play: short to second to first.

pivot, and throw to first base. This makes it impossible for the runner to interfere with the infielder in any way.

When covering second base on a double play, the shortstop should expect the throw from the second baseman to be directly at his face, the same as when the shortstop throws to the second baseman, and for the same reasons. The shortstop's pivot is easier than that of the second baseman's, because he is facing first base. However, it is necessary for him to make a fast, accurate throw and get out of the way of the oncoming baserunner. The shortstop should not let a runner who is coming into second base standing up affect his throwing. He does not want to hit the runner with the ball, but he should make his usual throw. *It is the runner's responsibility to get out of the way.* Most runners will slide into the bag unless they are easy outs, and if they are, they duck and get out of the way.

Game Situations. The shortstop must know where he should be on every play that comes up. With runners on first and second base and a definite bunt threat facing the defense, the shortstop should try to keep the runner close to second base before the pitcher delivers the ball, so that a force play may result at

Don't make a poor throw any worse. Be ready to go after it.

third base. When the second baseman goes out to the outfield for a relay, the shortstop should cover second base; the reverse is true when the shortstop goes to aid the outfielders. On balls hit to left field, when the third baseman acts as the cut-off man the shortstop covers the hot corner.

If there are baserunners on first and second base and the second baseman fields a slow-hit ground ball and forces the runner at the keystone sack, with no chance of doubling the batter at first base, the shortstop should be alert to a play at third base, where there is a possibility of the runner overrunning the bag. The shortstop handles the double steal play the same way as the second baseman, and when balls are hit to deep left or centerfield, the shortstop has to run out to relay the ball from the outfielders.

The Pivot Man

The pivot man (second baseman or shortstop) on the double play starting at second base has a difficult job. He must be able to execute a series of moves with clockwork precision if the play is to be effective consistently. How can he perfect this difficult maneuver?

He should analyze what he has to do:

1. Reach second base quickly.
2. Be in position to receive the ball.
3. Catch the ball.
4. Pivot.
5. Throw the ball to first base.

How can he best do this?

1. *Be in good fielding position.* This position will be affected by the batter, the type of pitch, the score, and other game factors. To get to second base quickly, the infielder can use the initial cross-over step, take normal strides until he nears the base, and then shorten his stride as he approaches the base. This de-

crease in the length of his stride may delay momentarily his reaching the base, but when he arrives at the bag he will be in perfect balance, ready to move in any direction for the throw. The infielder sometimes has to move laterally to catch a bad throw as he approaches the bag. He will be unable to do so if he is using his normal stride, and the ball will wind up in the outfield, each baserunner reaching base safely and possibly taking an extra base. The pivot man expects the throw at his face, but he has no guarantee that it will be there, so he must be able to catch a bad throw. This shortening of the stride near the base also enables him to locate and tag the bag more easily than when running with a long stride.

Field that slow-moving ball on the run and get it away fast.

2. To make sure he is in the best position possible to catch the ball, the pivot man should *get the angle*. This means he should be facing his teammate who is fielding the ball. The pivot man should square his shoulders. In other words, his shoulders should be at right angles to his teammate. The angle between the player fielding the ball and the pivot man at the bag should be exactly 180 degrees, making a straight line from the ball to the player at the base. This position enables the pivot man maximum lateral movement so that he can shift to either side for a bad throw.

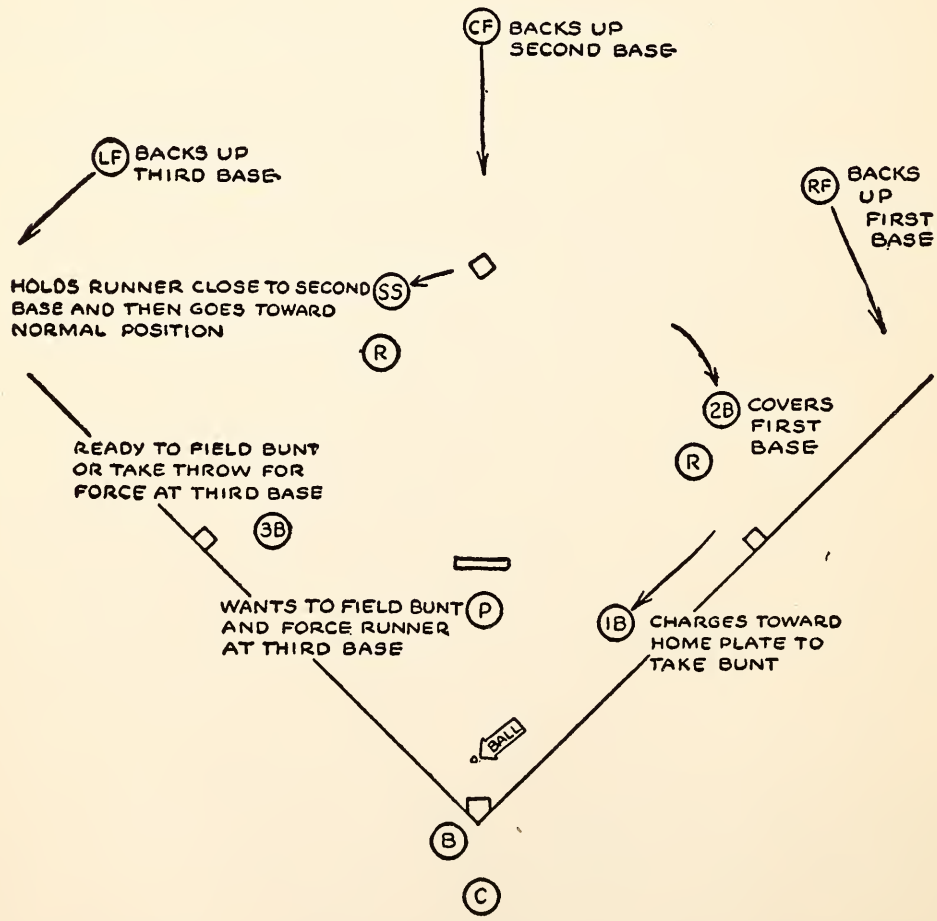
3. The pivot man has to catch the ball, and in order to do so *he must keep his eyes on it*. He must not be afraid that the runner from first base is going to collide with him. The most important part of the double play is getting the front runner. The pivot man must *make sure of one out* before he tries to get the second out.

4. The second baseman or shortstop should *master several types of pivots.*

5. *The pivot man should know the location of the initial sack at all times.* The bag never moves, and the infielder always should know his position in relation to it. The pivot man should get rid of the ball as quickly as possible, no matter what throwing motion is used.

The Third Baseman

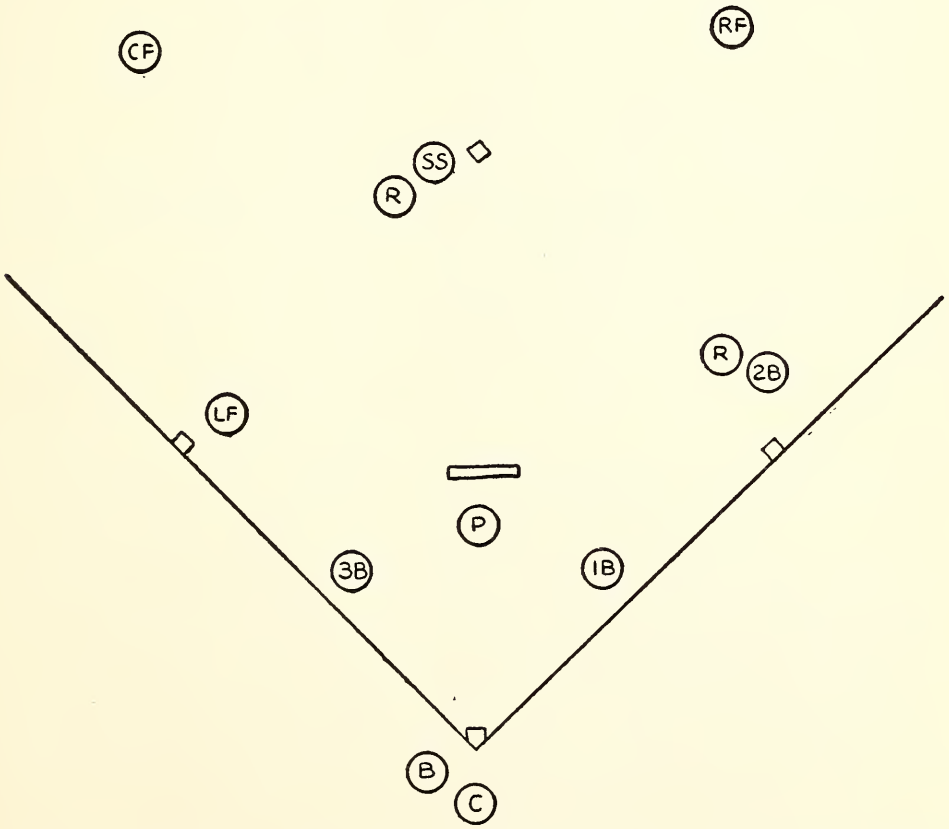
Fielding Position. The third baseman has a difficult position to play. He usually plays closer to the batter than any other in-


CF BACKS UP SECOND BASE
LF BACKS UP THIRD BASE
RF BACKS UP FIRST BASE
HOLDS RUNNER CLOSE TO SECOND BASE AND THEN GOES TOWARD NORMAL POSITION
SS
R
2B COVERS FIRST BASE
R
READY TO FIELD BUNT OR TAKE THROW FOR FORCE AT THIRD BASE
3B
WANTS TO FIELD BUNT AND FORCE RUNNER AT THIRD BASE
P
1B CHARGES TOWARD HOME PLATE TO TAKE BUNT
BALL
B
C

Orthodox bunt defense with runners on first and second. Try to get the front runner if possible.

fielder and consequently has less time to field the ball. This third base sector of the diamond often is called the "hot corner," because of the hard shots hit in that direction. When a right-handed hitter pulls the ball down the left-field foul line, it indicates that he is getting his bat out in front of his body and hitting the ball with maximum power—lo, the poor third sacker! It is helpful if he has a quick pair of hands, because he does not always have time to get in proper fielding position.

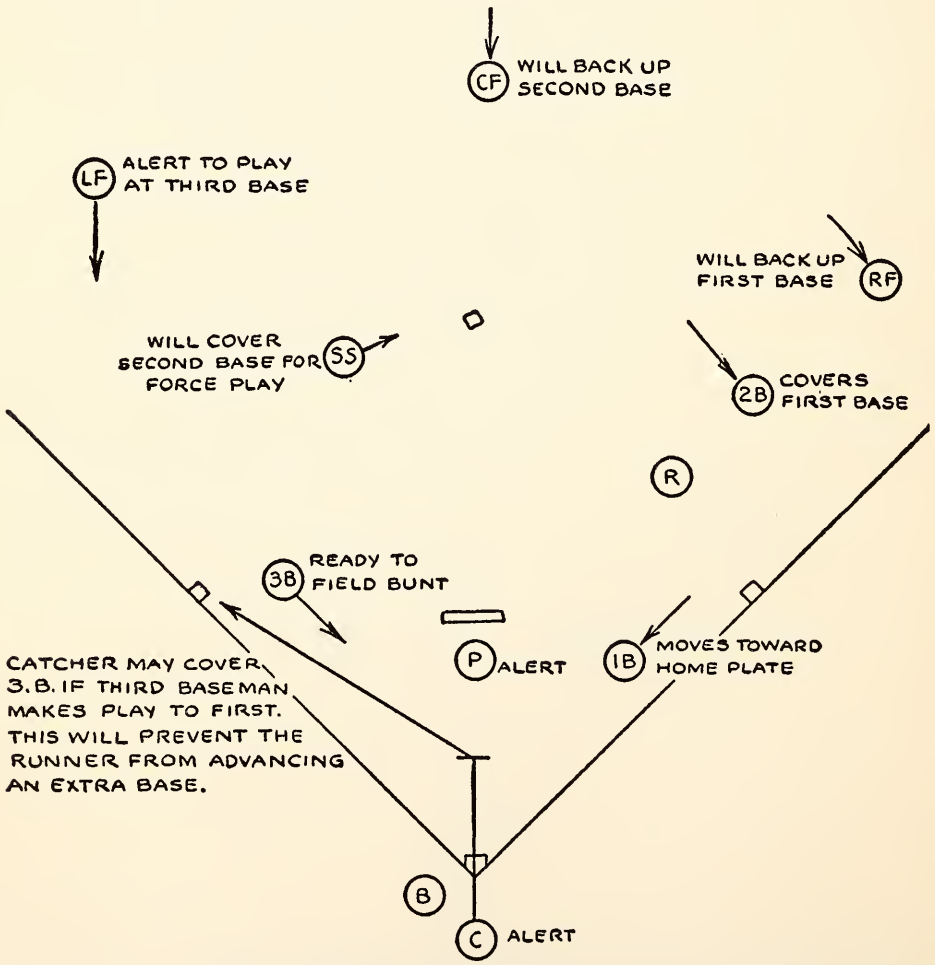
The threat of a bunt is imminent, and the third baseman must be ready to field this offensive weapon as well as the so-called "swinging bunt" (topped ground ball). These slow-hit balls should be fielded in the same manner the shortstop handles such grounders. The guardian of the hot corner should take every



Unorthodox bunt defense with runners at first and second. This may force the runner at third or make the offense use a pinch-hitter.

ground ball he can get his hands on. *Anytime the third sacker can cut in front of the shortstop and field a ball, he does so.* He reaches the ball faster and is in a much better position to throw, because he is going toward the play, whether it be at first or second base, whereas, the shortstop is going away from the play.

Bunt Defense. When there are runners on first and second bases, no outs, and the defense expects a bunt, the third baseman plays in such a position that he either can go in and field the bunt or cover third base. He plays almost even with the base, ready to go forward or to his right. If the sacrifice is successful, the third baseman may have to field the ball and make the



Bunt defense with a man on first.

play to first base. When the pitcher, catcher, or first baseman can field the bunt, the third baseman must be at his bag, so that the front runner can be forced at third if possible. A quick relay to the second baseman covering first base may result in a double play.

Game Situations. The third baseman may act also as the cut-off man on plays from the left fielder to the catcher, and he should be alert to any throws the second baseman or shortstop may make to him to catch runners who overrun the bag. When there is a runner on first base and the third baseman fields a bunt, the catcher covers third base and the infielder should cover home. Whenever the third baseman or first baseman can catch a foul ball near home plate, they usually do so, for they can handle it more easily than the catcher. The infielders have never lost sight of the ball and are approaching it from a better angle than the catcher.

Somebody say something!

A fly ball hit near the left-field line may be handled by either the third baseman or the shortstop, but the latter usually takes it because he is running at an angle to the ball, while the third baseman may have to catch it directly over his head. However, both infielders go after such balls. A defensive player goes after every ball hit to his territory. He may reach balls that did not appear catchable, the wind may bring the ball to him, or the sun may affect his teammate, making it necessary for someone else to catch the ball. Better to have two players in fielding position than none. Proper use of the voice, waving of the arms, or both, will avoid a collision.

8

OUTFIELD PLAY

THE THREE MEMBERS OF THE OUTFIELD MUST BE ALERT AND hustle every minute they are on the playing field. A good outfielder is aware of many details—*the direction and force of the wind, the position of the sun, the type of hitter at bat, the pitch that is to be thrown, the speed of the runners on base, the score, the number of outs, the inning, the distance to the fences,* and everything that makes up the present game situation. He must be aware of the layout of the diamond, the distance of the fence from his playing position, and the available terrain in which he can catch a foul ball, if he is playing right or left field. The outfielder also must be thoroughly familiar with the fielding territory he has to cover, and it is his responsibility to learn the lay of the land before game time.

Fielding

The prime requisites for a good outfielder are *good fielding, a strong arm,* and *powerful hitting.* If the outfielder is not a power hitter, he must be a very consistent hitter. Speed is an asset to any baseball player; it will help him both offensively

and defensively. But speed cannot be developed to any great degree, and a player should get as much mileage from his legs as he possibly can.

Let's assume that an outfielder is in the center of an imaginary circle. The radius of this circle depends on the outfielder's speed and his ability to get the jump on the ball as it comes off the bat. Each outfielder wants to have as large a radius as possible, so that he will have maximum ground coverage. The proper start will aid an outfielder in extending this radius. The cross-over step is recommended whenever an outfielder has to move laterally. This is the same initial step that is used by the

An outfielder often has to go to his left or right.

baserunner in attempting to steal a base, and by an infielder when he has to go to his right or left. If the outfielder is going to his right, he brings his left leg over his right and shoves off with his right foot. This enables him to cover a much greater distance on his first step than if he lifts his right foot and pushes

off with his left. When the outfielder is going to his left, he reverses the procedure.

The outfielder should not run on his heels when going after fly balls. When an outfielder has to go back for a ball, he may or may not use the cross-over step. He does not want to become tangled up, and the angle which he has to turn will depend on the flight of each ball. *There is no advantage in using the cross-over step when the outfielder has to go directly back for a ball.*

Once the outfielder has reached the ball, he faces the problem of catching it. He should use two hands whenever possible, because this decreases the chance of a fumble and usually puts him in a better throwing position. If the ball is caught above the waist, the palms of the hands are held up and the fingers extended toward the sky. If the ball is caught below the waist, the fingers extend toward the ground. It would be difficult to catch a ball in any other manner. When the ball is hit directly in the rays of the sun, the outfielder has to use his sun glasses or one hand to shade his eyes. It is best to use the gloved hand as it offers a greater shade.

Catch balls above the waist with the glove up.

When fielding a ground ball, the outfielder may use the same procedure as an infielder, or he may put one knee on the ground. The proper procedure to follow in fielding a ground ball depends upon the game situation. If the winning run is at second base late in the ball game, the outfielder may have to charge the ball in an attempt to make a play at the plate. This is a desperation play, and the defense is making a do or die effort. The ball must be fielded cleanly and a strong, accurate throw made to the catcher. If the tying run is scoring, the outfielder may either throw to the plate, in an attempt to get the runner, or to second, to prevent the winning run from advancing to second base. The outfielder must consider the difficulty of the chance, the possi-

bility of a play at the plate, and whether his team is batting first or last (the home team hits in the bottom half of each inning). The outfielder must pay as much attention to the game as the catcher or pitcher. Each player must know the current game situation!

Catching flies.

If there is no one on base and a ground ball is hit to him, he may play it safe by dropping one knee to the ground. The knee that touches the ground is on the same side that the player throws from. A right-handed player would put his right knee on the ground and a left-handed player would put his left knee down. This enables the outfielder to block the ball and still make a fairly fast recovery to the infield. The outfielder never places both knees on the ground, because this would delay his throw too long, and he would not be able to field the ball if it bounced away from him.

Whether an outfielder will attempt to make a shoestring catch of a line drive or let it fall safe also depends upon the difficulty of the play and the situation in the ball game. If the game depends upon catching the ball, the outfielder makes every effort

to catch it; he has everything to gain and nothing to lose, because if the ball drops safe, the game is over.

The left fielder should realize that a pulled ball has a tendency to hook toward the foul line, and a sliced ball will curve toward the same foul line also. A fair ball hit near the left-field foul line

One hand goes farther than two in that all-out try.

by a right-handed hitter will hook away from the outfielder toward the foul line. The same holds true of a ball sliced near the left-field foul line by a left-handed hitter. The right-fielder should keep in mind that a left-handed hitter hooks the ball toward the right-field foul line, and a right-handed hitter slices the ball toward the same foul line. Any ball hit near either foul line has a tendency to go away from the outfielder and toward foul territory.

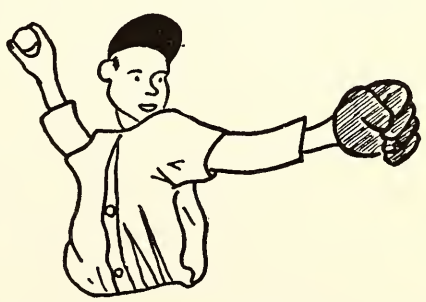
Throwing

After the outfielder has fielded the ball, the next problem, of course, is to throw it to the proper base. *There is no reason for the outfielder to delay his throw to the infield, particularly when*

runners are on base. He must get the ball back to the diamond as fast as possible, and he should be able to get full power in his throw by taking one or, at most, two steps before releasing the ball. The number of steps he takes will be determined by his body position when catching the ball.

The outfielder should throw the ball with an overhand motion, so that he will get maximum distance and a more accurate throw. A common fault of many young outfielders is that they throw too high to a base or home plate. They think it is necessary to reach the target on the fly, and in order to get maximum distance they throw "rain makers." These throws look more like fly balls and reach their destination too late. The ball should be thrown low enough from the outfield so that it travels in a straight line (no looping arc) and reaches the intended receiver in the air or on the first hop.

If the outfielder is throwing to the second baseman or shortstop when one of them is acting as a cut-off man, he throws at the infielder's head. The infielder has lined up the outfielder with his target, and the infielder has the option of permitting the ball to go through or cutting it off. The ball must be thrown where the infielder can handle it easily. If it is thrown over the infielder's head, the purpose of the cut-off play is defeated. For example, with a runner on first base, when a ground ball is hit to the center fielder and the runner attempts to go to third, the shortstop acts as the cut-off man and the second baseman covers the middle sack. The center fielder gets the ball and throws it at the shortstop's head. The shortstop either lets the ball go to the third baseman or cuts it off in an attempt to get the batter going into second base. If the shortstop cannot catch the ball, everyone may be safe.



Throw your gloved hand in the direction of the throw.

When the outfielder is throwing directly to a base, he may

bounce the ball on one hop to the bag. On a long throw to home plate, the cut-off man may receive the ball on the first hop because of the great distance the throw has to carry. He may let the ball bounce past him to the catcher if the throw is accurate and strong enough. This type of throw will reach its destination more quickly than a relay by the cut-off man. On a long extra-base hit between the outfielders or deep down the foul line, the outfielder should not attempt to throw the ball all the way home but should relay it to a cut-off man.

If the outfielder can throw the ball with the same grip as the pitcher uses for a fast ball (across the four seams), he should do so. However, he is in such a hurry to get rid of the ball that he cannot always grab it the way he desires. On a long one-hop throw by an outfielder with a very good arm, the ball will take off after it hits the ground. It will have a long carry on its first bounce, similar to that of a stone thrown to skip across a lake. If the outfielder has a poor arm, the ball will "die" after it hits the ground. Naturally, if the field is soft, the ball will not bounce as well.

The outfielder must know his fielding ability, so that he knows how deep or shallow to play. His position will vary with the hitter, but the fielder who can go back for a ball does not have to play as deep as a player who cannot. During outfield practice, the fielder should improve his fielding of ground balls and flies. He also should become familiar with the fences, because he will have to play rebounds off them.

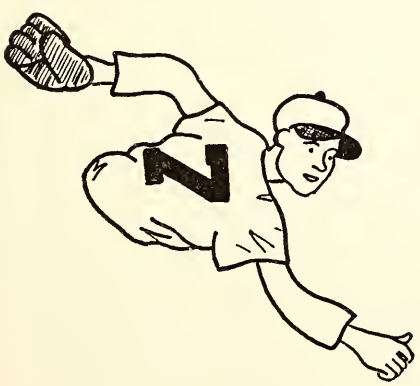
Game Situations

It is necessary for the outfielder to use his voice properly to avoid confusion when a ball may be fielded by one or more players. The center fielder is usually the "take charge guy" in the outfield. He is normally the best fielder and takes everything he can reach, unless a teammate can make an easier play. Proper use of the voice will avoid collisions and eliminate the Alphonse

and Gaston act, where one fielder says, "After you," and the other fielder says, "No, after you," with the result that the ball drops for a base hit. The outfielder who is not catching the ball can tell his teammate where to make the throw for a possible play.

Use gloved hand and arm for leverage on a long throw.

If there is a choice between an infielder and an outfielder catching a fly ball, the *outfielder* usually takes it, because he is coming in toward the ball and is in better position to field it and throw it in case of a play at the plate. The outfielder also backs up his teammate, whether it be another outfielder or an infielder, on both thrown and hit balls. On throws to the various bases by the catcher, the outfielders must get in position to back up the infielders. Sometimes an outfielder can help out the infield in a rundown, especially after several throws have been made and the infielders are out of position. This is poor defensive play, but the main objective is to get the offense out, and if the outfielder can help, he should. Sometimes there is a play at third base and the batter takes a big turn around first base. The third baseman often throws to the first sacker in an attempt to get the batter. The right fielder should back up such a play. When backing up an infielder, the outfielder should not get too close, or the throw will get by him also.



Follow through with your gloved hand and complete the throwing arc for greater power.

The Extra Infielder

When the defense expects a definite bunt play, a radical shifting of players may be used. This pro-

cedure is not recommended for young players, although they should be aware of the various defensive formations in baseball.

The so-called five, six, or seven-man infield alignment rarely is used. This play employs one of the outfielders as an infielder. It is used when there are baserunners on first and second base, no outs, and a weak hitter but good bunter at the plate. The game situation dictates a bunt by the offensive team, which may be two runs behind in the late innings of the game. The offensive team wants to tie the score and try for the win in extra innings. The home team bats last and is more likely to play for a tie than the visiting team, which might gamble on winning the ball game with a pinch-hitter. If the visiting team plays for a tie, the home team still has another opportunity to come to bat.

Learn to go back for those long balls.

The purpose of bringing an outfielder into the infield is to get the force-out at third base, and perhaps a double play. There are variations of this play, but the infield usually is deployed in such a manner that there is a player near first, one at second, and another near third base. The outfielder is brought in to play third base, the shortstop covers second base, and the second baseman protects first base. The first and third basemen assume positions on either side of the pitcher, about 40 feet from home plate and 10 feet from the foul lines.

In addition to the first baseman, second baseman, shortstop, and third baseman, the outfielder becomes the fifth infielder. As soon as he releases the ball, the pitcher becomes the sixth infielder, and, after the ball has been bunted, the catcher becomes the seventh infielder. Any bunt should be well-covered. The inside men in this defense, the first and third basemen, must possess speed, strong throwing

arms, and courage. The two remaining outfielders use their own judgment on where to play, or they are waved into position by the coach or manager. They may attempt to cover the whole outfield by playing in left center and right center, or they may play where the batter usually hits the ball. The weak hitter may be a late swinger, and therefore one outfielder may play close to the opposite foul line.

When the defense assumes this position, it may force the offense to insert a pinch-hitter into the line-up. If the regular hitter is a pitcher who has been pitching good ball, this is a victory for the defense. The defensive team can then shift back to a normal bunt defense, and the outfielder can go back to his usual position. Even if the pinch-hitter does bunt successfully against the orthodox defense, the defense will face a different pitcher next time at bat.

9

SIGNALS

A TEAM CAN FUNCTION MORE PROFICIENTLY IF EACH MEMBER knows what his teammate is going to do. This holds true of both the offense and defense teams. On a spontaneous play, it is often impossible for a player to signal his intentions or know what his teammate is doing, although drills and practices help players react in the desired manner when certain plays occur. The offense team usually has enough time to plot the strategy to be used in any situation. This refers primarily to the take, steal, and bunt signs. Signals should be kept at a minimum to avoid confusion, and often a team can go through a game using only these three signs.

The batter usually gets his signs from the third-base coach, although the first-base coach may give them from time to time, or he may get them directly from the bench. In many instances the third-base coach is the head coach or manager of the team, and it is much easier for him to give the signals than to relay them to another coach to flash to the batter or baserunner. If the third-base coach or the first-base coach must receive the signals from the bench, the relay system is necessary. Sending

signals from the bench to the coaching lines is a relatively simple matter and can be done in several ways.

Signs may be classified as *flashing signs* or *holding signs*. Flashing signs are given in an instant and are for the more mature player. Holding signs stay "on" for several seconds and are for the younger player. If the coach touched the peak of his cap quickly, that would be a flashing sign. If the coach took off his cap for a few moments, he would be giving a holding sign.

When giving signals to young teams, the *holding sign* is best. The head coach assumes some natural pose, such as crossing the legs, putting a hand to the face, folding the arms, or hiding one hand. The base-line coach observes the position of the head coach and flashes the signal to the player. The base-line coach often cannot give the sign by assuming the same pose as the head coach, for this may be impractical (i.e., crossing the legs), but he signifies what the head coach wants done by using some other holding signal (i.e., hand on hip). It probably is better to have the base-line coach use the same sign as the head coach to avoid confusion, but the coaches can use different signs to mean the same thing if they feel the signs may be stolen. The important thing is that the base-line coach inform the player of the wishes of the head coach. The holding sign is best for the young player, because it is being given at all times, and the coach can be sure the player received the signal. He does not have to guess when the player is going to look at him. However, the holding sign usu-

The third base coach signals: "Stop but stay up!"

ally is detected more easily by the opposing team than a flashing sign. If the head coach feels that he is being closely watched by the opposition, he may have the player next to him, or someone else on the bench, send the signals to the players or base-line coaches.

Take–Steal–Bunt

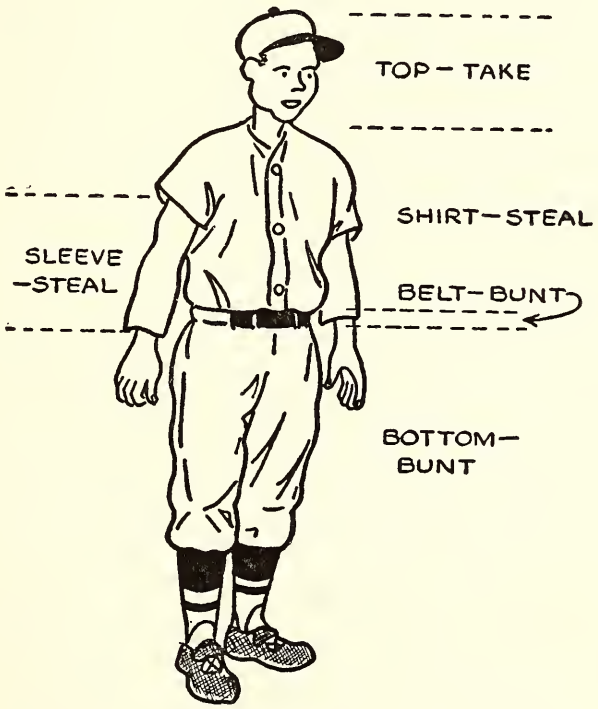
The *take* sign means that the coach does not want the batter to swing at the next pitch. The team may be several runs behind, and the coach wants the batter to wait out the pitcher in the hope of getting a walk; or, the count may be two balls and no strikes or three balls and one strike, and the possibility of getting a walk is much greater than when the count favors the pitcher. Many coaches do not use a *hit* sign but have players understand that the hit sign is always on, unless the take sign is given.

A third base coach should give a definite slide signal.

By the same reasoning, a player knows that he should not attempt to steal unless the steal sign is on. *There never is a do-not-steal sign.* Steal signs may differ. A coach may flash a steal sign which means that he wants the baserunner to steal *if* he gets the jump on the pitcher. If the runner does not get the proper lead and break on the pitcher, the coach may not want him to attempt a steal, because the chance of getting thrown out is great. However, there are situations in the ball game when the coach wants the runner to try to steal on a certain pitch, whether he gets the proper jump or not. A different

sign may be given for this type of steal. Placing one hand on the shirt may mean "Go if you get a jump." Placing both hands on the shirt may mean "Go on this pitch."

If the sacrifice or squeeze play is in order, the batter must be given the bunt signal. When the suicide squeeze play is on, it is a good idea for the batter to give the coach a return signal



A simple way to signal: touch different parts of your uniform.

which indicates that he knows what he is supposed to do. If the batter misses the signal on the suicide squeeze, the runner is an easy out.

As pointed out in an earlier paragraph, signals should be as simple as possible. Sometimes, word association helps a player remember signals. An example of this would be: *T–top–take, S–shirt (or sleeve)–steal, B–bottom (or belt)–bunt.*

The coach's person would be divided into three parts:

Top—including face and cap; anything above the neck.
Shirt—from the belt to the neck, excluding the sleeves.
Bottom—any part below and excluding the belt.

If the coach placed his hand on his face, touched his cap, or cupped his hands to his mouth, the *take* sign would be on. If he touched any part of his shirt with his hands, the *steal* sign would be on, and if he touched any part of his pants, the *bunt* sign would be on. The coach may use the belt instead of a position below the waist as a bunt sign. He should keep in mind, however, that he cannot stand on the coaching line in a scarecrow position, afraid to touch any part of his uniform for fear of giving some sort of a signal by mistake.

The "Indicator" System

In order to have freedom of movement without the danger of giving a sign, some coaches use the "indicator" system. *This means that a coach may give any signal he desires, but it does not mean a thing unless he has given an "indicator sign" first.*

Clap your hands as the "indicator." Then give the signal.

Let's assume that a coach is using the *Top-Shirt-Belt* signs, with a clap of the hands as an indicator. He can touch any part of his body, but he is not giving a signal; he may brush the peak of his cap, rub his hands on his shirt, or pull up his pants, but no signal has been given. However, if *he claps his hands and then adjusts the peak of his cap*, the take sign is on. Any sign that is given following the "indicator sign"—the clapping of his hands—is on. *If there is no indicator sign, there are no signals whatsoever.*

The position of the coach in the coach's box also may be used as an indicator. If the coach is standing at the far end of the box, the signs are off, and if he is standing at the end nearest

the hitter, the signs are on. This procedure also could be used in reverse.

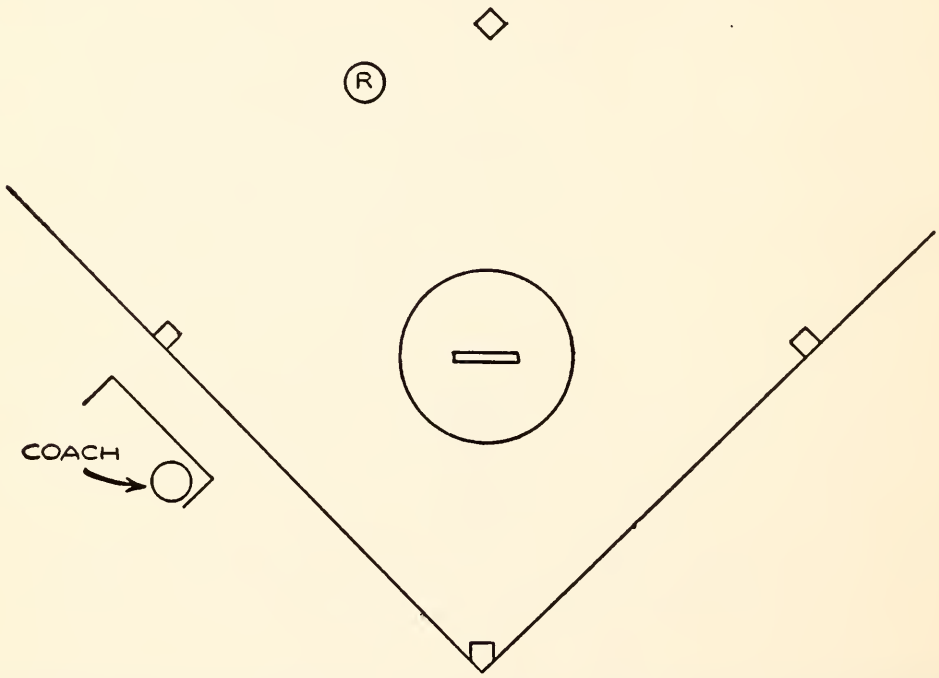
The third base coach signals: "Hurry! Tag third and go on home!"

The Hit-and-Run

It takes lots of practice to become a skilled hit-and-run batter. The ball should be hit on the ground, preferably behind the runner. Generally, this play is used with a runner on first base in an attempt to advance him as far as possible. The coach can give the hit-and-run signal to the batter and baserunner, although some coaches have the hitter give the sign to the runner. Each hitter may have his own sign, and it is necessary for a player to know the signs of the hitters who follow him in the batting order. This is an important phase of offensive baseball, because the extra base a runner advances through this maneuver often means the difference between winning and losing the ball game.

The Position of the Coach

The position of the third base coach is extremely important. With nobody on base and a strong right-handed pull hitter at the plate, the coach can stand as deep (away from the batter) in



Position of the third base coach with a runner on second or approaching third.

the coach's box as possible. However, when there is a runner on second base, or a runner coming into third base who may hold up there or attempt to score, it is imperative for the coach to be in the shallow (closest to the batter) end of the coach's box. In this position he can wait until the last possible moment, if he has to, before signaling the runner what to do.

10
DRILLS

A PLAYER MUST BE IN EXCELLENT PHYSICAL CONDITION TO PLAY baseball. Drills help him attain this objective and also acquaint him with various phases of the game. The correct way to make certain plays is taught by this method, and the athlete carries over to a game what he learns in practice. This repetition of an activity does not limit a player's ingenuity, because baseball is a spontaneous game. Each player has to perform certain feats as efficiently as possible, and drills aid him in playing to the utmost of his ability. They do not result in robot-like movements on the part of the players. "Drill is important in fixing the skill learned, in perfecting its form, and in acquiring satisfaction in the experience." * Youth must have the opportunity for accomplishment, enjoyment, exercise, healthy competition, and supervised play. Baseball offers an excellent vehicle for these purposes. The drills described in this chapter are helpful for the development of the embryonic baseball player.

* Williams, Jesse, *Principles of Physical Education*, p. 322. Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company, 1942.

"Baseballnics"

Calisthenics help a player get in the proper physical condition and are used as a warm-up drill. However, the player should do only those exercises that will help him and refrain from those that may be harmful. The baseball player does not want to become muscle-bound, and it is not necessary for him to follow the training routine of a football player or weightlifter. One who aspires to be a ballplayer needs to develop his strength, but there is no necessity for doing an excessive amount of duck walks, push-ups, sit-ups, or similar exercises. However, these exercises are beneficial when done in moderation, and will help to develop a player's strength. The player should concentrate on calisthenics that are similar to the movements he will make when playing baseball. Perhaps *baseballnics* is a better name than calisthenics for these exercises. Aside from the general loosening up exercises such as bending, stretching, running in place, and deep breathing, baseballnics include the cross-over step, throwing, and swinging and bunting movements.

Leads and Breaks

A baseball player's legs must be in tip-top shape, and he must *run, run, run*. After the team is in good condition, the coach can have his players practice leads and breaks. If a track is available, it may be used, although any level area will do. The team is divided into several groups. Each group forms a line, and the first player in each line takes a lead of about 12 feet from "first base." On a signal from the coach, he breaks for "second base." The first step should be the cross-over step. After the player has attained full speed, he slows down and comes back to the end of the line to await his next turn. Thus, the team is indoctrinated into getting a good lead and break when stealing.

The coach or captain then assumes a set pitching position, and the players take their lead from the imaginary first base. When

the pitcher makes his move to home plate, the players break for second base, but if the pitcher makes a motion toward first base, the players hustle back to the bag. Many a player will be caught going the wrong way. This is good experience for the players, and they learn one of the fundamentals of good baserunning, the proper start. Later, they can practice this individually on the regular diamond.

Relay

To help take some of the drudgery out of running, the team may be divided into two groups, A and B. Each group is divided in half; one half of each team stays at one end of the field while the other half moves as far away as the coach desires—anywhere from 90 to 200 feet is sufficient. This drill is a relay race. The first player in one half of group A and the first player in one half of group B have gloves. On a given signal, they run to the other half of their team, and pass the glove to the first player in line. This procedure of running back and forth continues until each player has run once. Of course, to increase interest, the groups should be as evenly matched as possible.

Individual Speed

The team should have some idea of the speed of each player, and the most scientific way to get this is by using a stop watch. Each player should be timed individually; this is not a race against another player, but against *time*. Probably the best way to have the players run is from a cross-over start for a distance of 60 yards. This is almost the same distance a player would run if he hit a double, only he is running it now in a straight line. A baseball player rarely has to run any greater distance than this. The average mature player takes between 7.4 and 7.3 seconds to run this distance, and it can be determined whether a player is an above-average or below-average runner by comparing his time with these figures.

Running Bases

The players also should practice running bases, starting at home plate and running to first base, tagging the inside of the bag, pivoting properly, and continuing to second base. The runner should practice proper running form as described in the baserunning chapter. The most difficult thing for the runner to perfect is the pivot, and this should be practiced, practiced, and practiced some more. It is not necessary to have the runners circle the bases; running to second base is enough.

Sliding

One of the most important phases of baserunning, and one that is sadly neglected, is sliding. Every team should have a sliding pit where this activity may be practiced. A pit about 10 feet square and 1 foot deep, filled with sawdust, is satisfactory. The team lines up about 40 feet away, and one by one the players run and slide in the pit. A loose base is placed near the middle of the pit to serve as a target. The main objective of this practice is to develop correct sliding form.

The sliding player sometimes will not reach the base in the pit; in fact, he should not, for he wants to time his slide on the regular diamond so that he will not hit the base hard. If a player slides in the practice pit the way he does in a game, he will not reach the bag, because he can slide much farther on dirt than on sawdust. A rake should be kept handy to smooth the sawdust after each slide. Be sure that the rake is safely put away before a player slides.

The player should be taught to slide on either side; later on, the coach can pretend he is the infielder covering the base, and the player can slide away from his tag. A short lecture and demonstration on the proper way to land in a slide may be given before this practice, so that the players will know exactly what they are supposed to do.

The Batting Tee

Batting practice is one phase of the game that requires little, if any, persuasion on the part of the coach. Most players will get in the batter's box and swing as long as you'll let them. If the coach is not careful, one of the players is liable to take root up

The batting-tee can be shifted to different heights. Use your regular batting form.

there and never get out of the box. During the pre-season drills, it is advisable to have a pair of golf gloves or handball gloves available to prevent blisters caused by friction between the batter's hands and the bat. If the baseball squad is engaged in indoor practice in early spring, simulated batting conditions can be very helpful. The batting tee may be used; this gadget will help to develop proper batting and bunting form. The tee is an inexpensive device to make, and every team should have one. Almost anyone can construct a batting tee by following the instructions given here.

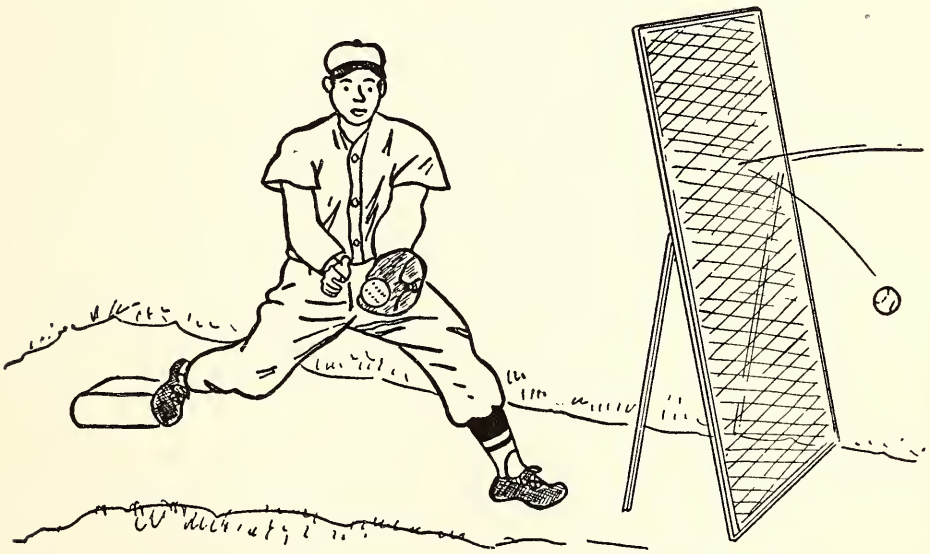
Batting Tee Construction. Construction of the batting tee is simple. The parts can be duplicated very easily. The baseboard should be rather rugged, approximately 30 inches long, 11 inches wide, and 1 9/16 inches thick. The top board is 9 inches wide, 12 inches long, and 7/8 inches thick. An extra piece should be placed on the front end to serve as a bumper and reinforce the board. The two strap hinges can be 6 inches long and should be bolted on. The height of the top board, because of the hinges, should be the same both front and back. The distance in the back can be made up with mending plates, which should be screwed on both top and bottom pieces. An extra piece of wood may have to be used as a spacer with the mending plates. These plates also are used as bumpers.

The 1-inch pipe with the two thumbscrews is 9 inches long and threaded on one end. The threaded end screws into a 1-inch flange, which is bolted through the top board, keeping the flange as far front as possible. The sticks in the pipe are broomstick handles (maple wood), and four sticks should complete a set—the lower one 12 inches long, the next one 22 inches long, the third 34 inches long, and the longest one 40 inches long. As a rule, the diameter of the sticks is about 7/8 of an inch, so friction tape can be used to make a snug fit into a 1-inch diameter piece of automobile radiator hose about 12 inches long. The bottom piece of hose is 9 inches long and fits on the broomstick handle about 3 inches. The three other pieces are 12 inches long and fit on the broomstick handles about 4 inches. The top of each piece of rubber hose should be chamferred with a razor blade to make a better seat for the baseball. There is no reason why these specifications cannot be altered if desired. A shop class in high school could easily make a batting tee.

A makeshift batting tee can be constructed inexpensively. A large pail or bucket forms the base of this batting aid. This receptacle is filled with sand and the desirable tee is forced into the sand. The tees should be of various lengths so that the batter can practice hitting balls anywhere in the strike zone. Each

tee consists of two parts, a piece of rubber hose and a length of a broomstick. Each hose should be about a foot long, but the broomstick lengths will vary. These tees are constructed of the same materials as the regular batting tees. The only difference between the regular and makeshift models is in the construction of the base.

It is imperative that a batter use the tee correctly if it is to aid him in his batting. He should guard against developing bad habits here that will affect his hitting when he is facing live pitching. The purpose of the tee is to *improve* a player's hitting. Practicing correctly will help one play correctly.



The first baseman should be protected by a screen from any balls hit during batting practice.

If the regular batting tee is used, the arrow should be placed so that it is facing the pitcher's position. This will permit the tee to give with the swing if the batter swings below the ball, thus preventing the tee from becoming broken or damaged. The batter should assume his regular batting stance in relation to home plate. The position of the tee is varied from time to time; this simulates pitches over the inside and outside corners of the

plate. However, the batter does NOT adopt a stance closer to the plate to hit outside pitches and a stance farther from the plate to hit inside pitches. He must stay his normal distance from the plate at all times and adjust himself to hit an outside pitch by stepping into the ball and an inside pitch by pulling the ball. The batter cannot change his stance in a ball game, because he does not know where the pitcher is going to throw the ball. He should not change his stance in practice either.

The height of the tee should be changed occasionally so that the batter can practice hitting the ball anywhere in the strike zone. There is no point in placing the tee outside of the strike zone and having the batter swing at bad balls, because he should swing only at good balls in a game. However the tee might be placed outside the strike zone to show the batter what happens when he swings at bad balls, to discourage him from doing so.

A player should *not* use the batting tee in the same manner a golf tee is used. That is, he should not take a couple of preliminary swings at the ball before hitting it, as a golfer does when addressing the ball. He should focus his eyes on a spot where the pitcher would normally be and "follow" the ball until contact is made with the bat. Remember that the batter should hit the ball in front of his body to get maximum power in his swing. The batting principles described in Chapter 2 should be followed. He should not permit the bat to fly out of his hands, and he must be certain at all times that there is no danger of anyone being hit by the bat. Indoor practice does not allow the same freedom as outdoor practice, and the player should be aware of the precautions necessary in cramped conditions.

Whether the team is practicing indoors or outdoors, using the regular stand or the makeshift stand, it makes little difference as far as use of the tee is concerned. When practicing indoors the players may use woolen baseballs that can be purchased from almost any sporting goods dealer. These balls resemble regular baseballs in size and shape, and even have stitches sewn in them. If they cannot be obtained, the batter may make his own balls

out of paper wound with adhesive tape. The composition of both balls is ideal for indoor use. The batter may use the tee in a cage of some sort, or drive the balls into a net, canvas, or wall without causing any damage as long as he holds on to the bat. During outdoor practice, he may hit in a cage or into the backstop. He can use either woolen baseballs or regular baseballs. It is not necessary to have new balls; used balls serve the purpose just as well and help hold down expenses. Sometimes the tee can be placed at home plate on the regular diamond, and the batter can practice his swing there. He should not expect to hit the ball as far off the tee as he would against live pitching.

The batting tee also can be used to practice bunting. It is a great help in developing proper bunting form for the novice (Chapter 3), before he faces regular pitching.

During practice games, the team at bat can make use of the batting tee. The tee should be placed in some out of the way spot so that it will not interfere with the game. A good place for it is behind the backstop, where the spectators normally would be, if there is ample space. The player then can hit into the backstop. The one who will be the third hitter in the inning can practice on this tee while one player is batting and the next hitter is on deck. As soon as the batter completes his turn at the plate, the on-deck hitter goes to the batter's box, the batting tee hitter goes to the on-deck circle, and a new hitter uses the batting tee. This enables each hitter to get a few practice swings at the batting tee and then observe the pitcher while on deck before actually hitting. If the batter is not prepared by this time, he never will be.

The Pitching Machine

Some of the professional teams and a few college teams use an automatic pitching machine during pre-season practice. This machine can consistently fire straight balls, and control and velocity of the pitches can be regulated. The value of the ma-

chine is that it never gets tired and can get the ball over the plate. There is also a machine that can throw curve balls, and while this is not the same as live pitching, it is a definite practice aid. It does not require a batting practice catcher. After a batter has completed his hitting session, all the balls are rolled to the operator of the machine and the next hitter steps into the box. These machines are rather expensive, and a luxury rather than a necessity.

Batting Practice

Actual batting practice is the most popular drill for the player who is at the plate, although it may be rather boring for the rest of the team. The main factor in making this drill interesting for the entire team is a good batting practice pitcher. Many times the pitcher cannot get the ball over the plate, forcing the batter to swing at bad balls or wait for a good pitch. If the batter swings at bad balls, he is developing a bad habit and not deriving any benefit from the practice. It would be better if he didn't hit at all. When he is forced to wait for a good pitch, he may become disgusted and not be ready to hit the pitch when it finally comes over the plate. The rest of the team must stand around and wait, too, and this can be trying on the patience.

The batting practice pitcher should remember that his main purpose is to get the ball in the strike zone with a little something on it. He should not lob the ball over the plate, but should serve up a pitch that is fairly easy to hit and will allow the batter to get his eye on the ball so that he will be able to follow it better in a game. The rest of the hitters want to get up at the plate, and the faster the pitcher can take care of the present hitter, the smoother the practice will run. The pitcher should not endeavor to impress the coach or manager during batting practice by trying to strike the hitters out; the object is to let them hit the ball.

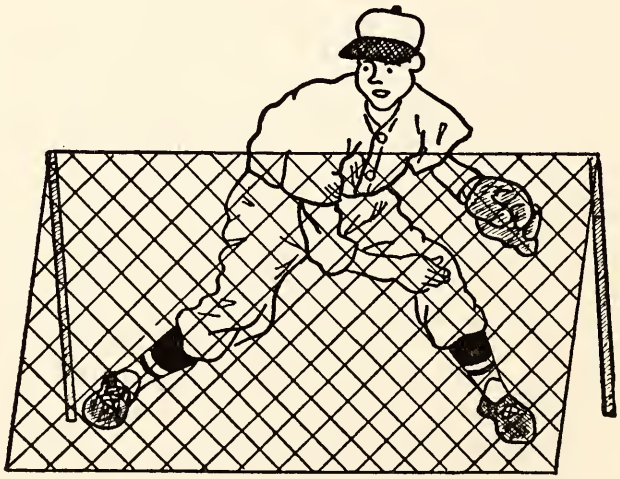
A pitcher usually does a better job during batting practice if

he has a catcher. The catcher offers a target and helps the pitcher's control. In order to let the pitcher devote as much time and energy as possible to getting the ball over the plate, he should be supplied with a feeder or backer-up. This player makes sure that the pitcher has a supply of baseballs to throw to the batter. After a fielder has caught a ball, he returns it to the feeder by bouncing it to him. The pitcher should start out with about four or six balls and then refuel after this supply has been exhausted. It is not necessary for him to get a ball from the feeder, throw it, and immediately get another ball. He should keep extra balls in his pockets; however, he never should keep an extra ball in his glove, for it will prevent him from catching a line drive hit directly at him. The pitcher rarely should throw for more than 15 minutes. He is throwing rapidly, with little rest between pitches, and does not want to strain his arm. He may have to take his regular turn in a game soon.

The batting practice catcher does not give any signals to the pitcher, for there is no attempt to fool the hitter. The best pitch to throw is a medium fast ball that the batter can hit easily. If the hitter desires a curve ball, he will signal the pitcher to throw it, usually by calling to him or by making a motion for a curve ball with his wrist. Naturally, the catcher should know when a curve ball is coming. Sometimes a coach may want to observe a batter under game conditions and will have him hit without knowing what pitch is coming. In this situation, the catcher, or the coach standing behind the batting cage, will give the signals to the pitcher. In either case, the catcher knows what pitch is coming.

During pre-season practice, the team may hit in any order, but once a regular batting order has been established, the team should follow it. When there is regular practice, the team may hit as long as the coach desires. However, the length of the pre-game batting practice will vary with the team, league, weather conditions, and other factors. Fifteen or 20 minutes should be the minimum pre-game batting practice time for any team under normal weather conditions. A team should be able to bat around

once in this time if the batting practice pitcher can get the ball over the plate. Each hitter will hit four or five fair balls and bunt at least once. Any player who may possibly get in the game (except extra pitchers) should take batting practice, if time permits. If a team is completing its batting practice and everyone has hit, the players continue to hit in order but jump into the batter's box, hit one ball, fair or foul, and then let the next hitter take over. If the hitter hits a ball that would ordinarily be a base hit, he may stay in to hit another ball. This adds a little spice to batting practice and gives a small reward for a well-hit ball. When a team is having pre-season practice, the hitter may run out his last hit to first or second base, but this is not done in pre-game batting practice.



The pitcher is protected during batting-practice by this screen.

To keep the players in the field on their toes, a player or coach may hit ground balls around the infield while batting practice is in progress. This is not recommended for the younger teams, as it takes a certain amount of batting skill to avoid hitting the pitcher, the feeder, and other players. The fungo hitter should not hit the ball at the same time the batter is hitting the throw from the pitcher. If he did, it might result in an infielder

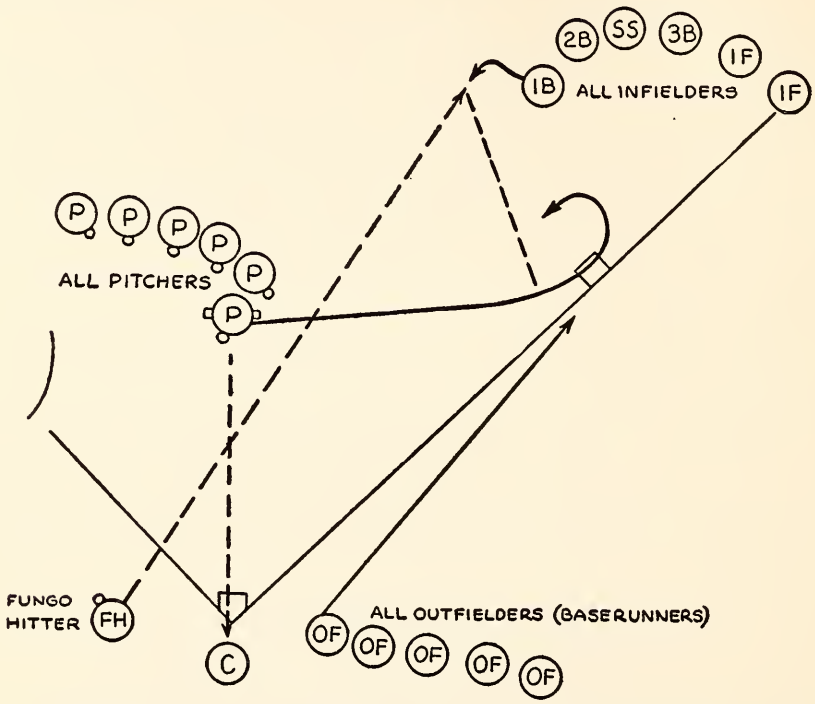
getting hit by a batted or thrown ball for the infielder usually makes his play to the first baseman. If fungo balls are going to be hit, a screen should be put up in front of the first baseman to protect him from batted balls, because the batter often is hitting the ball by the time the first sacker catches the fungoed ball thrown by another infielder. A small screen also may be erected in front of the pitcher to protect him from hot shots hit back through the box by the batter. This half screen is low enough to permit the pitcher to throw over it, and it prevents low batted balls from hitting him.

Pitcher Covering First

The pitcher may be helped immeasurably by certain drills. In addition to following the procedure described in Chapter 5 concerning the stance, grip, delivery, and follow-through, these drills are recommended.

Pitchers need practice covering first base. Without tiring the pitcher, and keeping the team active, the best way to practice this maneuver is as follows: Line up all the pitchers at the pitcher's mound. Each has his own ball. A catcher stands in his regular position behind home plate while a fungo hitter, who has a ball, stands off to the side, out of the batter's box. All the infielders form a line behind the first baseman who plays his regular position. The first pitcher assumes his normal pitching position, winds up, and throws the ball to the catcher. The fungo hitter immediately hits a grounder with his own ball, and it is fielded by the first baseman, who throws to the pitcher covering the bag. The pitcher uses proper follow-through, is ready to move wherever the ball is hit, sees that the first baseman will field it, then runs in almost a direct line to the bag. He catches the throw from the first sacker, steps on the inside of the bag, then whirls to his left so that he will be in position to make a play at the plate. The pitcher keeps the ball and returns to the end of the line at the pitching mound. The first baseman goes to

the end of the fielding line. The catcher gives the fungo hitter the ball he has received, and everyone is in position to continue the drill.



A fungo is hit to the infielder and the pitcher who threw the ball races to take the throw at first.

After a while, the fungo hitter may start mixing his shots, hitting the ball to the infielder, near the mound where the pitcher can field it, and occasionally toward the shortstop's position. This will prevent the pitcher from anticipating where the ball will be hit. If the pitcher can field a ball that is hit toward the second baseman's position, he does so. Practicing this play develops teamwork and helps emphasize proper use of the voice between the pitcher and the first baseman. If the pitcher fields the ball, the first baseman must cover the bag. When the first baseman fields the ball, the pitcher must cover. The runner will be safe if both defensive players attempt to field the ball or if neither of them fields it. Later, the outfielders can form a line at home plate and run to first base when the balls are hit by the

fungo hitter. Thus, the entire team is used in one drill, and everyone is kept active. The pitchers have the most work to do, and there should be at least six players in the line at the mound.

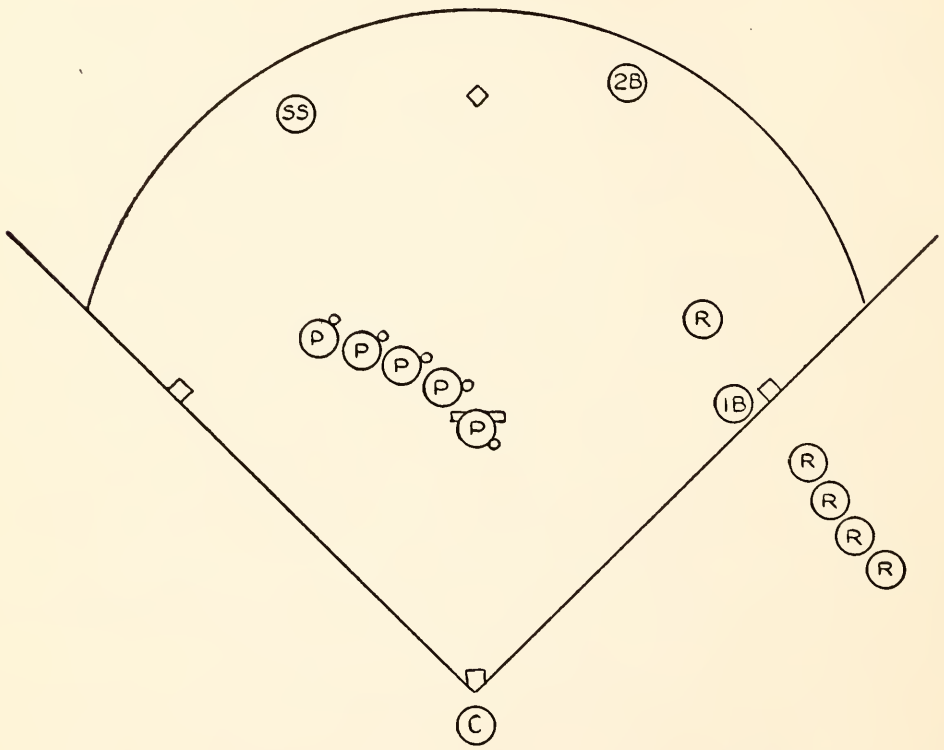
Keeping Runners on Base

Another pitching drill is to practice keeping the baserunner on first base. This drill serves many purposes: the baserunner gets experience on taking a good lead and getting a good start, and the pitcher, catcher, and infielder all get defensive practice. The pitchers form a line behind the mound, and the baserunners form a line at the first base coaching box. The catcher and first baseman assume their positions. There is a runner on first base, so the first sacker must play at the bag. The first pitcher takes his set position, and the first baserunner gets his lead. The pitcher tries to prevent the runner from taking too large a lead, and he may throw over to the first baseman, attempting to pick off the runner. The runner wants to steal second base and gets as big a lead as possible. If the pitcher thinks he is not permitting too large a lead, he throws to the plate. Otherwise, he throws to first base.

If the runner thinks he has a large enough lead, he uses the cross-over step and tries to steal second base. The catcher gets practice throwing to second base, and the infielder gains experience covering the bag and taking the throw. The runner does not slide in his attempt to steal second; he goes in standing up, or he may stop and get caught in a rundown when he sees that he will be an easy out. If the runner does not think he has a large enough lead, he fakes going to second and returns to first base. The catcher may throw to first base if he thinks he has a chance of nabbing the runner.

When the pitcher is in his set position, he may step back off the rubber if the runner commits himself too soon. Any time the runner is about half way between the bases, the pitcher runs directly at him and forces the runner to break for a base. When

he does, the pitcher throws to that base and the infielder tags the runner. If the pitcher throws immediately to first base, the runner will break for second and, because of his very large lead, may beat the throw from the first baseman. This drill gives the



The pitcher on the rubber tries to determine whether he should pitch to the catcher with a runner leading off first. This is good practice for pitchers, infielders, base-runners, and the catcher.

pitcher valuable experience in keeping men on base and in making the delivery to home plate from his set position. The coach watches the pitcher closely to detect any balk motion. According to baseball rules, it's a balk when:

1. The pitcher, while touching his plate, makes any motion naturally associated with his pitch and fails to make such delivery.

2. The pitcher, while touching his plate, feints a throw to first base and fails to complete the throw.

3. The pitcher, in pitching position, fails to step directly toward a base before throwing to that base.

4. The pitcher, while on the pitcher's plate, throws or feints a throw to an unoccupied base, except for the purpose of making a play.

5. The pitcher delivers the ball to the batter while his pivot foot is back of or not in contact with the pitcher's plate.

6. The pitcher delivers the ball to the batter while he is not facing the batter.

7. The pitcher makes any motion naturally associated with his pitch while he is not touching the pitcher's plate.

8. The pitcher unnecessarily delays the game.

9. The pitcher, without having the ball, stands on or astride the pitcher's plate or while off the plate, he feints a pitch.

10. The pitcher, after coming to his set position, removes one hand from the ball other than in an actual pitch, or in throwing to a base.

11. The pitcher, while touching his plate, accidentally or intentionally drops the ball.

12. The pitcher pitches while the catcher is not in the catcher's box.

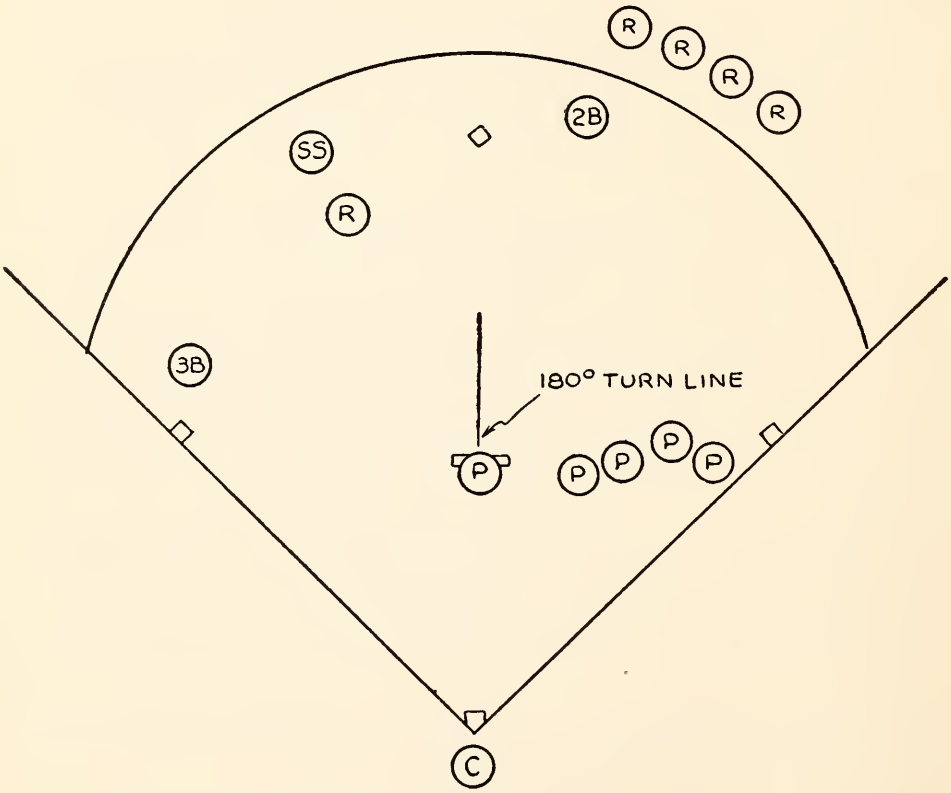
13. The pitcher delivers the pitch from set position without coming to a stop of one full second.

14. The pitcher makes a quick-return pitch.

Picking Runners Off Base

The pitcher needs practice in pivoting and picking runners off second base. The pitchers form a line off to the first base side of the mound while one of them takes his set position on the rubber. The runners form a line in shallow right centerfield as the first runner assumes his lead off second base. The second baseman and shortstop get in playing position and work a pick-

off play with the pitcher. The *daylight play* (page 85), the *count play* (page 129) or the *feint play* (page 128) may be used. The baserunner can allow the pick-off to succeed at first, for the defensive players need practice in executing this play. As the defense becomes more skilful in performing the pick-off plays, the runners can play for keeps.



Practicing the pick-off at second. The pitcher takes his set position on the rubber as the first runner assumes his lead off second base.

When the pitcher makes his pivot to throw to second base, the right-hander must remember that he has to turn by way of first base and the left-handed chucker by way of third base. Another way to remember the correct way to turn is for the pitcher to turn toward his gloved hand. To aid a pitcher in executing his 180-degree turn (page 87), the coach can scratch a line on the ground from the pitcher's pivot foot toward second

base. After the pitcher makes his turn and throw to the keystone sack, his stepping foot should be on or past this line. The pitcher's throw should be knee-high to the third base side of second base, so that the infielder can catch it and be in good tagging position.

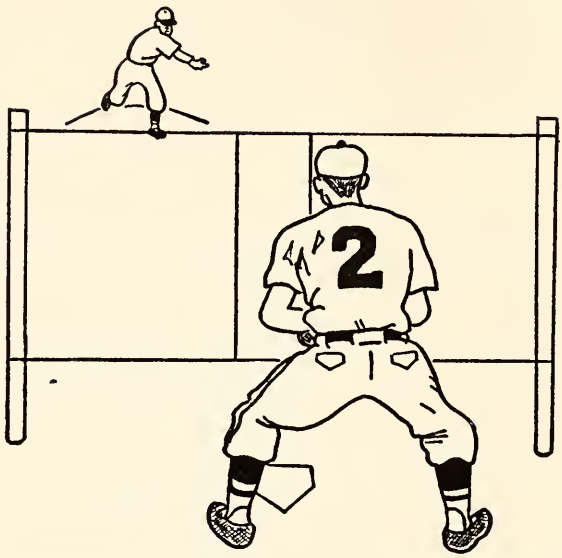
Control Drill

Control is a must for pitchers, and in addition to the helpful procedures described in the Pitching chapter, the "strings" may be used. This control aid is easy to construct, but should not be erected on the diamond of the playing field. A good place for it is an out-of-the-way spot where the pitchers can warm up, or possibly in the home team's bull pen.

The strings are held in place by two metal or wooden poles about eight feet high and eight feet apart. These poles are placed in the ground, and home plate is located between them. A wooden home plate may be used, because its only function is as a target. Remember the point of home plate is toward the catcher. Two strings are stretched horizontally from one pole to the other, the lower string knee-high and the upper string armpit-high to the average batter. Two vertical strings are tied to the horizontal strings, extending above the sides of home plate. These four strings form the rectangular strike zone, which is 17 inches wide (the width of home plate) and approximately 36 inches high (distance between a player's knees and armpits). When the pitcher is warming up, he may use these strings as a guide to see if he is throwing strikes or balls.

However, the pitcher should use the catcher's glove or shoulders and knees as targets, not the strings. The strings will not be there when he's in a ball game. It is not practical to have a batter stand at home plate to give the pitcher a good idea of the strike zone every time he warms up. The strings serve this purpose admirably. A batter who swings at bad balls in a game may stand at the strings to observe strikes and balls, thereby getting

a better idea of the strike zone. The batter does *not* swing at the pitches.



To improve a pitcher's control, strings can be used during practice to outline the strike-zone.

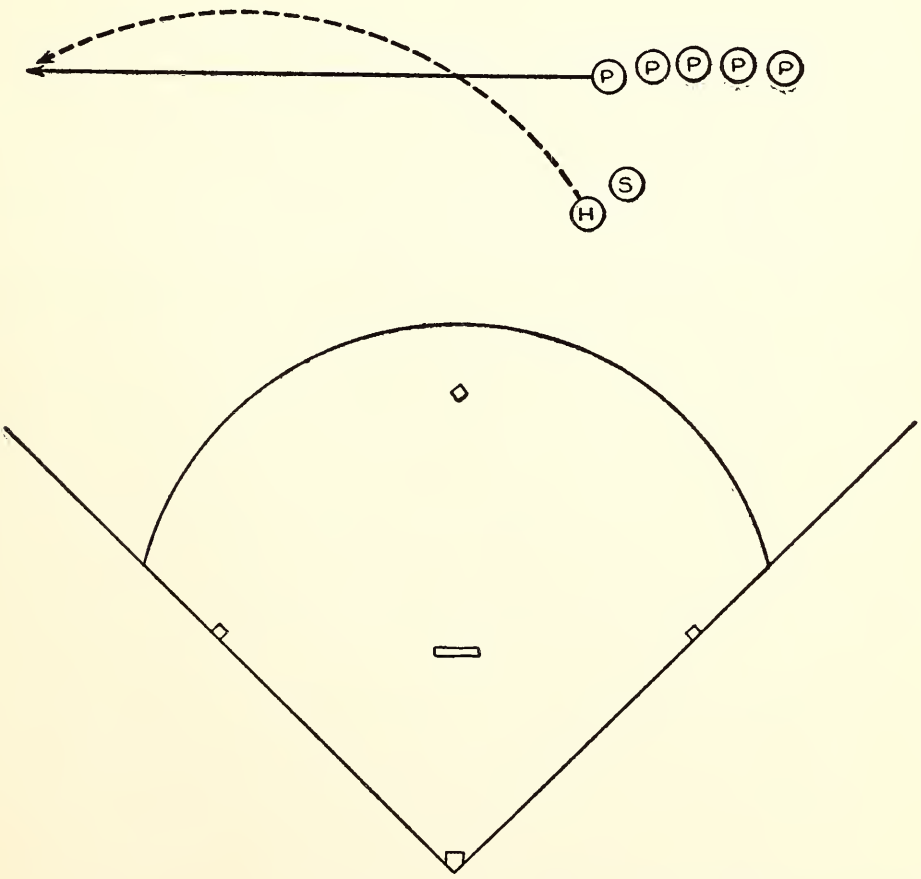
To construct the string apparatus, use sturdy metal or wooden poles. The poles do not have to be thick, for they are supporting only strings. The strings themselves should be strong but not too thick. Do not use rope. Any kind of strong cord will do. The coach may experiment with various colors of string, although white has been found satisfactory. The levels of the horizontal strings may be adjusted, depending upon the average height of the hitter. Younger and smaller boys naturally have smaller strike zones than older, taller boys. The vertical strings remain constant, because the width of the plate never changes. Actual pitching conditions should be simulated as nearly as possible. It will help the pitcher if he throws from a mound instead of level ground. If two string apparatuses are constructed, they should not be placed too close together; young pitchers often are wild, and a catcher cannot warm up one pitcher if another is taking

pot shots at him. The catcher can practice giving signs and assuming his proper stance during this drill.

Fungo Hitting to Pitchers

It is important for pitchers to keep their legs in condition. Some pitchers tend to become lax in this matter once the regular season starts. All the pitchers who did not pitch the day before and are not pitching this day should line up in the outfield. For illustration purposes, we'll say the line is in right center field, although the location can vary according to the layout of the field.

The first pitcher runs toward left field, and after he has run

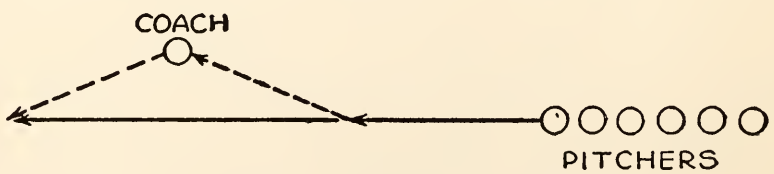


How to keep pitchers in shape. The pitcher should have to run to catch the fungo hit ahead of him by the coach.

a good distance, about 100 feet or so, the fungo hitter, who has assumed a position in shallow right center field, hits a fly ball to him. The ball should be aimed so that the pitcher must continue running to reach it; he should not have to backtrack for it. The hitter should have several balls available, and the player who pitched the previous day can serve as a shagger to catch returned balls. After the last pitcher has taken his turn, the line is formed again in left field and the same procedure repeated toward right center field. It takes a skilled fungo hitter to make this drill run smoothly. The ball must be hit so that the pitcher has an opportunity to catch it on the fly, giving him an incentive to chase the ball.

Throw-Catch Drill

Another drill that can be used to make running attractive to the pitchers is the throw-catch drill. All of the pitchers who are not pitching in the game can line up at the foul line in distant right field, facing center field. Each pitcher has his glove and a ball. A coach or reserve player stands half way out to centerfield, in right center. The first pitcher runs toward the coach. When he is 10 or 15 yards away from the coach he throws him the ball, the coach catches it, permits the pitcher to run past, and then returns the ball to the pitcher by giving him a lead throw. The pitcher catches the ball over his shoulder and gradually slows down. He then waits at the head of a line which forms in center field and repeats this process by running back to his original starting point at the right field foul line.



This throw-catch drill can keep the inactive pitcher in condition. The pitcher tosses the ball forward to the coach who flips the ball ahead of the pitcher again.

Pepper Games

There are various defensive drills that a team should practice so that the proper plays can be executed during a game. Before the team engages in any drills, it should be properly warmed up. Running a few laps loosens up the legs, and a "pepper game" is an excellent activity to prepare a team for a drill. The pepper game may be a drill in itself.

A few players act as fielders—it doesn't make any difference what position they regularly play—and line up about 15 to 20 yards from a hitter. If pitchers are going to pitch this day, they should refrain from participating in pepper practice to conserve their strength. The hitter uses a regular bat, not a fungo bat. One of the fielders throws a ball to the batter, and the batter hits it back to him and then alternately hits to each of the other fielders. A game may be made out of this activity, the fielders counting how many consecutive times they catch a ball without error. The fielder who misses a ball may "back up" the rest of the fielders until someone else misses and takes his place. Later, the batter changes position with one of the fielders, and this is done until everyone has an opportunity to hit. This is a good drill for a few players who may get out on the practice field early. It is not a good pre-game drill, for a ball may be hit into the stands and injure one of the spectators.

The Rundown Play

The rundown is a play that should be practiced often. Almost the same player alignment is used for this drill as was described for the drill in which the pitchers practiced keeping a baserunner on first base. The pitchers form a line at the rubber, and the catcher and infielders assume their proper positions. The runners line up at the first base coach's box.

The play starts when the pitcher picks a runner off the initial sack and a rundown play develops. With a runner on first, the

first baseman has to play on the bag. The runner permits himself to be picked off by the pitcher on a throw to the first baseman. After the runner is caught between first and second base, he goes all out in an attempt to reach second or first base. It is the defense's responsibility to put him out. The correct rundown procedure, as explained on page 113, should be followed. The fake throw, with full follow-through, should be used, because it will fool the runner time and again. The odds are with the defense on any rundown play, and the baserunner should be complimented if he succeeds in gaining a base. On the other hand, the defense should expect to be censured if it fails to nab the runner.

Later, the runners can form a line near second base, and the baserunner allows himself to be picked off at that base. This gives the defense practice in making the daylight play, the feint play, and the count play, and also gives the pitcher additional pivot practice. After the runner has been picked off base, he makes every effort to make third or regain second base. When this is finished, the runners form a line near third and permit themselves to be picked off at that base. This drill gives the pitchers practice at picking runners off every base and gives the infielders and the catcher practice in making the rundown play. Because all the outfielders and extra players are runners, the entire team takes part in the drill. Substitute infielders and catchers relieve the regulars, and everyone gets an opportunity to be a baserunner. The baserunner has the most difficult task and should not be expected to run more often than when his regular turn comes up.

Double Steal Defense

The double steal defense must be perfected; this maneuver by the offense is far too successful in the younger leagues. To drill the team in the defensive set-up, the infielders and the catcher should assume their regular positions. The runners are divided into two groups, one group goes to first base and the other to

third. The first runners in each line become baserunners at first base and third base, respectively. The first sacker must play on the bag because of the runner. The pitchers form a line near the mound, and the first assumes his set position before delivering the pitch.

After the ball is thrown to the catcher, the runner on first tries to steal second. The catcher has three choices to make—throwing to second base, throwing to the pitcher, or faking a throw to second and throwing to third. It is necessary for the defense, particularly the catcher and pitcher, to have some sort of signals to avoid confusion. Hand or glove signs may be used. The runner on third base makes his move, depending upon what the defense does.

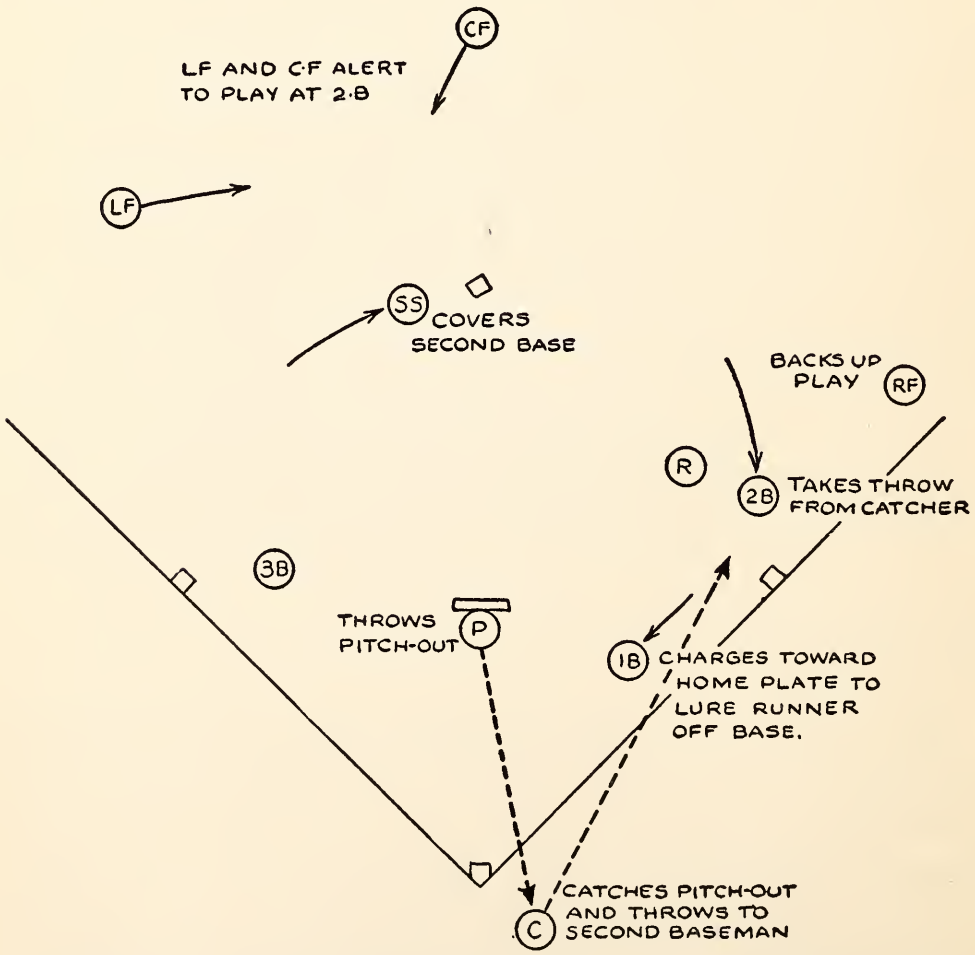
The runners do not slide in this drill. If a runner is an easy out, he may stop and get caught in a rundown play. When the runner gets caught between third and home, he tries to delay the out to permit his teammate to reach third base. If both runners reach the same base, the runner who originally had the bag is entitled to it. The second runner must go back to his previous base if he can. When the infielder finds two runners on the bag, he can tag both players, but if they both remain on the bag, the original runner is safe. Sometimes the runners become confused, and both leave the bag and can be tagged out, making an easy double play.

Bunt Defense

The defense must practice against all possible bunt situations. The bunt defense drill also will give the batters bunting practice. The offense is divided into two squads, the bunters and the baserunners. The bunters form a line near home plate, and the runners form a line at first base. The infielders assume their defensive positions. A runner is put on first base, and the first baseman must play on the bag. The pitcher takes his set position and then throws the ball to the plate. The batter, using proper bunt-

ing procedure (page 40), lays the ball down. The defense, with the catcher, pitcher, third or first baseman fielding the ball, makes a play at first or second base. The second baseman must cover first base and the shortstop second base. The catcher must be alert to cover third base if it is left unprotected, to prevent the runner from taking an extra base. The defense tries to make the play at second base, if possible, then first.

Later, runners are placed at first and second base. The batter tries to advance them to second and third base by bunting. The defense tries to make the force play at third base. The pitcher



A pick-off at first with the bunt coming up. The catcher signals for the play, waits for a return-signal from the first and second basemen, and then calls for the pitch-out.

takes his set position, the shortstop feints toward second base to prevent the runner from getting too big a lead, the second baseman is ready to cover first base, and the first baseman is ready to charge toward the plate. The third baseman plays about a stride or two on the home plate side of third base, ready to run in and field a good bunt or drop back to take a throw and make the force play at the hot corner. How the defense plays the ball depends upon where it is bunted.

Outfield Drills

The outfielders need practice backing up the bases and throwing. In one drill, all the defensive players, including the pitcher, assume their regular positions. A runner is put on first base and another at home plate, and the fungo hitter assumes his position near the mound. A ground ball or bounced line drive is hit to one of the outfielders, and as the runners move, the defense assumes the proper cut-off position, depending upon where the ball is hit. If the ball is hit to the right or center fielder, the shortstop acts as the cut-off man and the outfielder aims the throw at his head. The shortstop may let the throw go to third base, catch it and relay it to third, or catch it and throw to second base. What he does depends upon the throw and the speed of the baserunners. The first choice is to get the runner at third base. If this is impossible, the shortstop tries to get the batter, who is now going into second base, or make him stay at first base. The pitcher must back up third base.

A baserunner is then stationed at second base, and the fungo hitter raps a base hit to the outfield. The first or third baseman acts as the cut-off man, depending upon where the ball is hit. The cut-off procedure outlined on page 121 is followed. The play is made at the plate or at second base. The defense tries first to cut down the runner at home plate and then to get the batter, who is on his way to second base. The pitcher backs up the catcher to retrieve a possible overthrow.

In another drill, the runners form a line near third base, and the first runner takes his lead at this bag. The fungo hitter hits a soft fly to the outfield, and the runner tags up and heads for home. The outfielder makes his play to the plate. The proper defensive player, the third or first baseman, depending upon where the ball is hit, acts as cut-off man. The pitcher backs up the catcher. In addition to the practice on defense, this drill also gives the runner practice in advancing on a fly ball. The baserunner does not slide in this or any other baserunning drill. The only time he slides during a drill is in the sliding pit.

Pre-Game Practice

A snappy pre-game drill denotes a well-coached team. After the team has been warmed up thoroughly, it takes the field. The coach or fungo hitter, who has a couple of good balls in his pocket, goes out near the pitching mound. He starts with the left fielder, hitting him a few bounced line drives. These balls should be easy to field, for the coach wants his team to look good during pre-game practice. All the difficult plays have been gone over again and again at regular practices.

The left fielder makes a couple of throws to second base and then a couple to home plate. These throws should be kept low and may be made on one bounce to the base. If the coach wants the left fielder to throw to third base, he may hit a couple of balls near the left-field foul line that require the fielder to run, catch the ball, pivot, and throw to the hot corner. Such balls should be hit so that the outfielder can reach them easily.

The fungo hitter then hits to the center fielder, who makes his throws to third base and then home plate, with the shortstop and the first baseman acting as the cut-off men. Two throws to each base are sufficient. If the coach desires, the center fielder may throw first to second base, although this is a short throw.

The right fielder is next, and he may warm up with some throws to second base, but he must throw to third and home.

The same cut-off alignment as for the center fielder is used. After the outfield has been taken care of, the fungo hitter goes to home plate to hit to the infield. Other coaches or players hit flies to the outfield while infield practice is going on. They must be careful not to hit the infielders.

The infield practice starts with the third baseman and goes clockwise around the infield. A fairly hard-hit ball that is easy to field is hit on several hops to the third baseman. He catches it and makes his throw to the first baseman, who relays his throw to the catcher. The catcher returns the ball to the third baseman, who is covering the hot corner. He starts it "around the horn" to the second baseman, the first baseman, and the catcher. The catcher gives the ball to the hitter, and the shortstop is next in line for a ground ball.

After fielding the grounder, the shortstop throws it to the first baseman. From there, it travels to the catcher, to the shortstop covering second base (while the second baseman backs him up), to the third baseman, and back home to the catcher, who gives the ball to the hitter.

The next ball is hit to the second baseman, and his throw goes to the first baseman; the ball then goes to the catcher, to the second baseman covering second base (while the shortstop backs him up), to the third baseman, to the catcher, and back to the hitter.

The ball then is hit to the first baseman, who throws it to the shortstop covering second base. After fielding the ball, the first baseman does *not* run over and tag first base and then throw the ball home or to any other infielder. The first sacker catches the grounder, throws it to the shortstop, and then runs to first base to catch the return throw from the shortstop. The shortstop covers second base on such a play, because he can make a much easier pivot than the second baseman. After the first baseman catches the return throw from the shortstop, he throws it to the catcher. The catcher throws the ball directly back to the first baseman at the bag, and he either whirls and throws the ball

to the shortstop at second base or makes a long throw to the third baseman covering the hot corner. If the throw is made to second, the shortstop relays the ball to the third sacker, who throws it to the catcher. When the first baseman makes the long throw to third, the ball is then thrown home. The second baseman is ignored on this play, and he never makes any attempt to cover first base.

The next play is for the catcher. The batter may bunt the ball or hit it with his hand so that it rolls a few feet away and can be fielded easily. The catcher makes his throw to the first baseman, who returns it to the catcher, and everyone is ready for the next infield round.

The infield is still trying to get the "batter" out, so all plays are made the same way, to first base. The procedure described in the preceding paragraphs is followed for the next round. The hitter may vary it slightly by hitting the ball to the opposite side of the infielder so that he will get practice going to his right and left. If during the first round the ball was hit to the left of the infielder, it may then be hit to the right of him or directly at him. The hitter must remember that all of the grounders should be fairly easy to handle, for the team wants to look its best. After at least two infield rounds in which the play is made at first base, the coach may then give the signal to "get two."

The double plays are very similar to getting the runner at first base, except that the throw goes to the pivot man at second base for the twin killing, who then relays the throw to the first baseman. The third baseman fields the ball, throws it to the second baseman at the keystone sack, and he relays it to the first baseman. The throw then goes to the catcher and back to the third baseman. Now that he has the ball again, the third baseman has three options. He may follow exactly the same procedure and have the ball travel to second, to first, and to the catcher, or he may make the long throw to first base and then have the ball go to the catcher. If time is a factor, the third sacker can throw the ball directly back to the catcher.

The shortstop fields the next grounder, flips it to the second baseman, who covers the bag, pivots, and relays the ball to the first baseman. The ball then goes to the catcher, to the shortstop at second base, to the third baseman, and back to the catcher. When the shortstop gets the throw from the catcher, he may return the ball to him in order to save time. The second baseman is next in line to field the ball, and he makes his throw to the shortstop, who covers second base, then runs over to cover the middle sack as the ball goes from the shortstop, to first, to the catcher, and back to the second baseman. The second baseman throws it to the third baseman or the catcher. The first baseman makes the same play as he did during the first round of infield practice when it is his turn to "get two."

After the catcher has fielded the ball, he makes his play to the shortstop, covering second base, and then receives the relay via the first baseman. After two or more rounds of making the double play, the infield may revert back to getting one out for one round, or it may make the play at the plate.

When making the play at the plate, the infield should play halfway or all the way in. The hitter hits a soft ground ball directly at the infielder, who throws it to the catcher. The infielder should try to throw the ball about knee high toward the third base side of the plate, so that the catcher can handle it easily and be in position to make the tag. The catcher does not roll the ball back to the infielder for an additional play at the plate. The play has already been made at home, and the batter hits the ball to the next infielder. After the first baseman has thrown the ball to the catcher, the infield drill is over.

The infielder should remember that he must cover his base after fielding the ground ball, to get the return throw from the catcher. He must anticipate where he is to make the play and what he is going to do next. The other infielders also must be alert, for they have to be at the right place at the right time. The shortstop always backs up the second baseman when the latter is taking throws from the catcher at the keystone sack,

and the reverse is true also. This is a probable game situation. When fielding balls, the infielders play in their normal positions, although a member of the second base combination may cheat a little if he knows he is to pivot on the double play. When the first baseman is not fielding the ball, he also may stand closer to the bag than usual when the play starts.

The catcher should practice making his throws from behind the plate. This is where he has to throw from when the game begins, and he should not get into the habit of being way out in front of the plate when making his throws, except when he is fielding bunts. The young catcher may take infield practice with his "tools" on. He may find it difficult to accustom himself to his shin guards, chest protector, and mask, and the infield drill may be used as a familiarization period.

All the players participating in infield drill—the catcher, third baseman, shortstop, second baseman and first baseman—should exhibit plenty of chatter, hustle, and ginger. They must be enthusiastic and get into the spirit of the drill. The infield needs to be alert and snappy in its execution of each play. Nothing looks as discouraging as a "dead" infield which does not evidence any desire to play.

The most important member of the pre-game drill is the fungo hitter. He may make the team look good or bad. The balls usually should be hit so that they can be fielded without too much difficulty. If an infielder is lackadaisical or keeps fumbling the ball, a hot shot might wake him up or enable him to overcome his nervousness. The balls should not be so easy that a two-year-old could field them. A fairly hard-hit ball, directly at the infielder on several hops, should be the aim of the fungo hitter.

Anyone can become a good fungo hitter through constant practice. A special fungo bat should be used. This is a much thinner bat than the regular bat and may be bottle-shaped. The bottle-shaped fungo usually is more popular with the experienced hitter. Strange as it may seem, it is easier to hit balls (not

pitched balls) with the fungo than with a regular thick bat. A fungo bat never should be used to hit thrown balls, for it is not strong enough for this and will break.

There are infield fungo bats and outfield fungo bats, the only difference being that the outfield fungos are longer. It has been the writer's experience that the outfield fungo is adequate for both purposes. The longer the lever the more power available. If the hitter wants to hit to the infield, he need not swing as hard as when hitting to the outfield, or he may "choke" the fungo stick.

The fungo hitter bats the ball by throwing it up in the air and then hitting it as it comes down. To hit a fly ball, the bat should take an upward arc; to hit a line drive, the bat travels in a plane parallel to the ground; and to hit a ground ball, the bat makes a downward arc. What hand the batter uses to throw the ball up in the air, and how he swings, depend upon whether he is left- or right-handed. The cross-handed swing should not be used. The ball should meet the bat at the fat end of the fungo. A common mistake made by the inexperienced hitter is throwing the ball up too close to the body. The ball should be thrown so that the batter has to reach for it.

The usual infield drill for young players results in several missed balls or bad throws, so the fungo hitter should start the drill with several baseballs in his pockets. The hitter hits to the outfield first so that these players will be free to catch practice fly balls hit by other players, usually a couple of pitchers or substitutes taking care of this job. The fungo hitter does not hit fly balls to the outfield. He should hit the ball in such a manner that the outfielder can field it quickly and be in position to throw. A line drive that bounces several times before it reaches the outfielder is ideal, for he can field the ball cleanly and get maximum power in his throw. The outfielder gets practice catching fly balls later. The fungo hitter can use two balls when hitting to the outfield. The first baseman is near the mound acting as cut-off man, and the hitter expects the balls to be returned

to him by this player. By using two balls, the batter saves time, because he is ready to hit the next ball to the outfielder while the first baseman is getting the return throw of the other ball. The hitter should make sure that all players are in correct fielding position before he hits the ball.

When hitting to the infield, the batter wants the ball to bounce several times before it reaches the infielder. He may hit the ball directly at the infielder, or alternate by hitting the ball to his right or left. The hitter must keep his eye on the ball at all times as it travels from one infielder to another. If he doesn't, he's apt to get hit by a thrown ball. Only one ball should be kept in operation during infield practice, and the fungo hitter should be in command of this pre-game drill. The *minimum* batting drill should consist of two rounds of "getting one out," two "double-play" rounds, and a round of making the play at the plate.

"Skull Practice"

Frequent "skull practices" should be held during pre-season workouts. These should not take up too much time, for it is difficult to hold the interest of the squad, particularly young players, for any great period. Fifteen minutes to one-half hour is sufficient. The coach can discuss fundamentals, techniques, rules, and any other pertinent topics. After an intra-squad or practice game, a meeting may be called to review the game. It usually is better to wait until the next day for such discussion, however, because the coach or players may not be in the proper emotional mood immediately following the game.

11
SCORING

There are many ways to keep score, and methods have been devised to let the scorer keep track of practically every pitch, the movement of each player, and other minute details of the game. Such procedure is too complicated for the inexperienced spectator-scorer, and it is often a waste of time and effort, for such information is of little or no value to him. Most spectators are interested only in statistics that can be easily kept and quickly added up. An elaborate score card may take up so much of the spectator's time that he misses a good part of the game while recording useless information. This can easily confuse him, and it annoys his neighbor when he is poked in the ribs and asked, "Wot hoppened?"

Reasons for Keeping Score

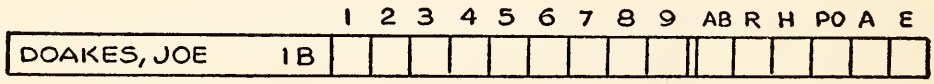
A simple scoring system is adequate for most needs. After a spectator becomes familiar with the fundamentals of scoring, he may adopt a more complex system if he wants. Sometimes he becomes so absorbed in score-keeping that it becomes a hobby, and he begins to keep a more extensive set of records.

Many spectators get great enjoyment from keeping score because it gives them a feeling of achievement and self-satisfaction that they would not get simply by watching the game. The score card becomes a souvenir and is taken home to show the family and friends. It "scoops" the newspaper report of the game and, while not official, is an accurate account of what happened.

The score card also gives a "running" description of the game, and it may be referred to when you wish to check the progress of your favorite player. A glance at your card will show how a hitter or pitcher has fared during earlier innings. Such information can increase enjoyment of the game greatly.

Before the Game

The usual score card lists the team's batting order. To the right of each player's name is a line containing a series of small, vacant boxes. Each box represents an inning, and here the spectator records all scoring information. At the end of each line is a place to write the totals of each player's achievements, including *AB* (number of times *at bat*), *R* (runs), *H* (hits), *PO* (put outs), *A* (assists), and *E* (errors).

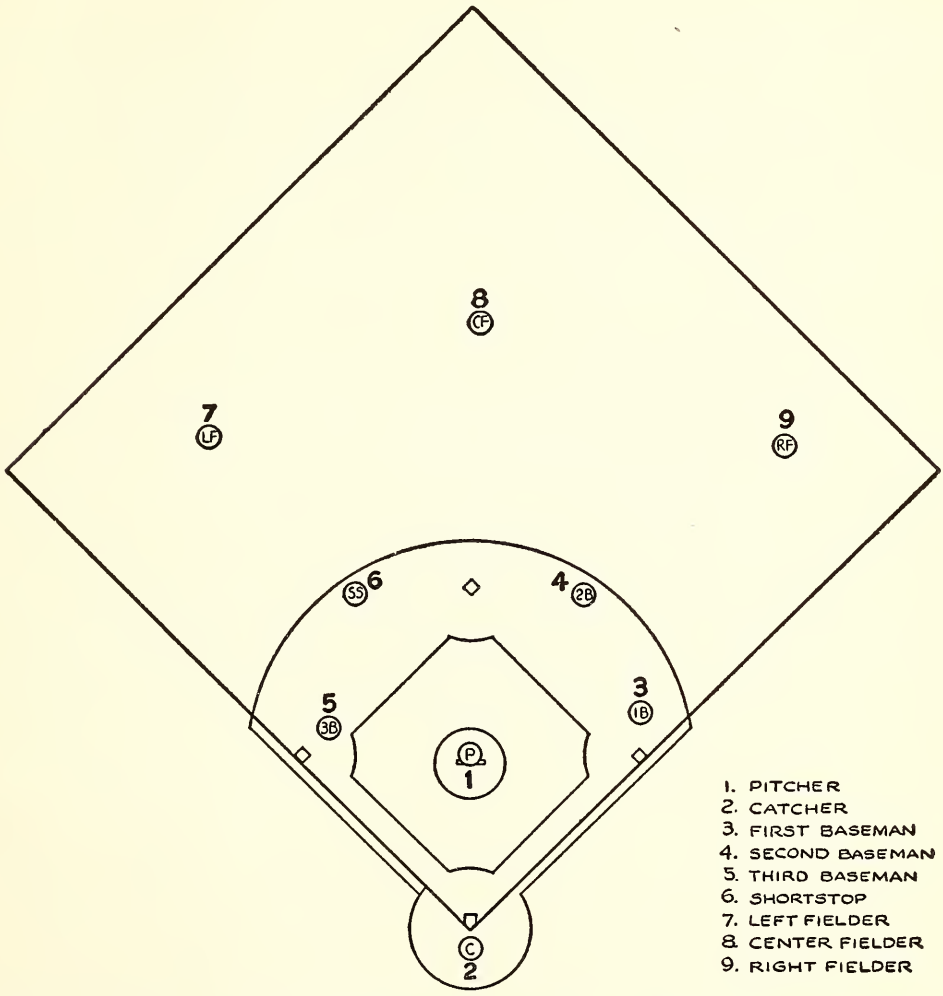


Individual entry on the score card (shown here slightly reduced).

The first thing a scorer does is to check the line-ups and make sure the players are batting as listed. When this is in order, he is ready for the start of the game.

For scoring purposes, the players are numbered 1 through 9, according to defensive position. It has nothing to do with the numbers on a player's uniform or his place in the batting order. When a substitute enters the game, he takes the same number as the man he replaces. Thus, all pitchers are No. 1, catchers No. 2,

first basemen No. 3, second basemen No. 4, third basemen No. 5, shortstops No. 6, leftfielders No. 7, centerfielders No. 8, and rightfielders No. 9.



For scoring purposes, the players are numbered one through nine. Note the numbers of the shortstop and the third baseman.

It will help the scorer to remember the pitcher's number by associating the most important position on the team with No. 1. However, the players are not numbered according to importance. The next player, No. 2, is the catcher, and then the infield is numbered in order, *counterclockwise*, except for the shortstop. Sometimes the inexperienced scorer confuses the shortstop

and the third baseman. The outfield follows in *clockwise* order.

When you study the system for a moment it becomes very simple. Quick now—who is No. 6?

Scoring the Game

After numbering the defensive players in this manner, it is easy to follow the ball as it travels from one player to another. When a few simple symbols are combined with these numbers, the spectator can record each play readily. The symbols usually are represented by the first letter in the word they stand for, and it is not difficult to memorize them. The only exceptions to this rule are the listing of base hits, and when two or more symbols begin with the same letter and some distinction must be made.

Each small box on the score card represents the entire playing field, and the scorer records the performance of each hitter and the progress of each baserunner. Home plate is the *lower left-hand corner*, first base is the *lower right-hand corner*, second base is the *upper right-hand corner* and third base is the *upper left-hand corner*. When the batter makes an out, this information is quickly recorded anywhere in the box, but if he gets on base, the same progression is used as on a regular diamond.

The easiest way to score a base hit is by drawing a straight line or a series of connecting straight lines, depending on the length of the hit. The line traces the runner's path around the bases. A small dot is put at the end of the base-hit line. This shows what kind of a hit it was—single, double, triple, or home run. The diagram on this page shows how various hits may be marked down. A sharp pencil will aid the scorer in recording such information.

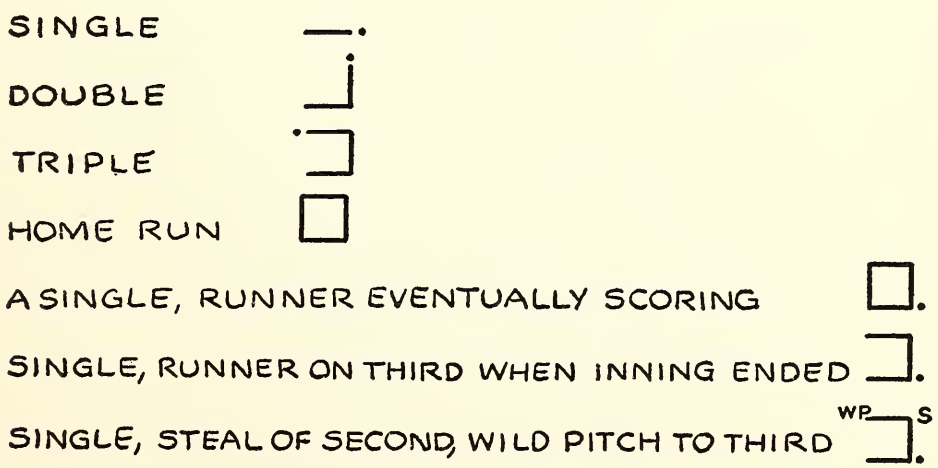
The following symbols should be studied so that the scorer can work quickly and efficiently.

BB – base on balls
BK – balk
E – error (safe on error)

FC – fielder's choice (safe on fielder's choice)
FO – force out
HP – hit by pitcher
PB – passed ball
SB – sacrifice bunt
S – stolen base
K – strike out
WP – wild pitch

A fly ball or line drive that is caught may be denoted by the letter *F*. There is no symbol for a ground ball that results in an out. A fly ball that is caught by the first baseman would be marked *F3*, or just *3*. It is advisable to use the *F*, because the *3* alone could be a fly ball caught by the first baseman *or* an unassisted ground ball put-out by the same player. A ground ball hit to the shortstop and thrown to the first baseman for an out would be *6-3*. The shortstop would get credit for an assist, and the first baseman would receive a put-out.

The scorer records all the information for a half inning, and when the side is retired, he draws a diagonal line in the box of the next hitter. When he returns to score the information on this team in the following inning, he starts in the box to the



These are a few of the easy symbols that you can use to keep a box score.

right of this diagonal line. The line prevents him from making the mistake of continuing his scoring in the wrong inning.

The columns at the right of the score card represent the totals for each player. *AB* stands for the number of times he was at bat, *R* for runs scored, and *H* for the number of hits he has had. Sometimes another column is listed and headed *RBI*. This signifies runs batted in—the number of runs the batter knocks across the plate.

All these columns give the spectator some idea of the offensive value of each player for that particular game. The rest of the columns—*PO* for put-out, *A* for assist, and *E* for error—give an indication of his defensive opportunity and skill. By adding these three columns—*PO*, *A*, and *E*—the spectator gets the total number of defensive chances of each player.

This scoring method is followed throughout the game, and can be perfected with a little practice. To aid in completing the totals for each player, it is advisable to place a small dot in the appropriate column whenever the occasion arises. If a player scores a run, a dot is placed in the *R* column; if he scores another run, then another dot is inserted. It is easier to add the dots in each column than to go through each player, inning by inning, to find his totals, although this may be done at one's leisure after the game is over.

It is important to remember that a player's offensive totals are put in his *AB*, *R*, and *H* columns, but that his *defensive* totals *(PO, A,* and *E)* are gathered from his opponents' section of the score card. If a batter flies out to the shortstop, the batter does not receive credit for a put-out, the shortstop does! If the batter reaches base because the shortstop makes an error, the batter is not charged with the error, the shortstop is! To record defensive totals as well as offensive, it is necessary to shift from one side of the score card to the other. If this is too much trouble for the beginning scorer, it is recommended that only offensive totals be kept at first since they are the most interesting statistics to keep anyway.

12

HOW TO SELECT A TEAM

MANY INEXPERIENCED COACHES, OR COACHES WHO ARE ASSUMING a new position and therefore are not familiar with the squad personnel, have great difficulty in selecting a team. This problem confronts all coaches to some degree, because of the turnover in playing material from year to year due to graduation, the advancement of a player from one age bracket to another, the influx of new players, and other reasons. Each case will vary, but there are certain things a coach can do that will help him select his team, whether it be at the Little League, Little Bigger League, American Legion, high school, sandlot, college, or professional level. Anything that will hasten the selection of the team in as scientific a manner as possible will aid the coach. In high school and college the baseball season usually is a short one, especially in the colder climates, and it is important for the coach to make the best possible use of limited time. The coach also wants to eliminate as much of the guesswork as he can, and the procedures explained in the following pages will enable him to do this. The baseball program can be divided into three periods: indoor practice, where all preliminary work is done; outdoor

practice, where the team is selected; and the schedule, when the games are played.

Indoor Practice

The first thing the coach has to do is to get the squad in good physical condition. It is not fair to the player or to the coach to try to judge a player's ability if he cannot perform at peak efficiency. Indoor practice is necessary in many parts of the country, and this period should be spent in getting the squad in top physical condition, so that maximum use may be made of the outdoor practice which follows.

The activities included for indoor practice depend upon the available facilities. The length and intensity of the practice session, indoor or out, depend upon the age group and physical condition of the squad.

Many coaches contend that it is of primary importance to get the players' legs in shape. Calisthenics, use of the track, and rope skipping can be used for this purpose. All players should take part in these activities. Catchers may be required also to shadow box and work out at the light or heavy punching bag to gain experience in shifting of the feet. The catcher does not use the cross-over step when fielding, as do the infielders and outfielders on the team. All players, although the pitchers may be excused, can use the medicine ball. This will help to develop the wrists, especially if a small ball (basketball size) is used. Use of the wrist roll machine will strengthen the wrists also.

As indoor practice progresses, throwing, particularly by the pitchers and catchers, should be incorporated into the program. If space permits, the entire squad can engage in throwing, pepper games, bunting practice, batting tee practice, and other activities that may be conducted in a field house or armory. Skull practices, clinics, or talks by men with vast baseball experience also can be added to indoor practice. A question and answer period may be conducted by the coach. It is too early to give

the squad signals, and this should not be done until the team has been selected. The use of movies may be helpful in maintaining interest and providing instruction during indoor practice.

Outdoor Practice

After a few days of outdoor practice, a baseball player should be able to show the coach what he can do. A slight injury, such as a pulled muscle, or the fact that the player may be a slow starter, can prevent the coach from getting a true picture of the person's ability. The coach should be aware of these possibilities. The player should be given every opportunity to demonstrate his ability, or lack of it, to the coach. The thoroughness of his trial may depend to a large extent upon the size of the squad, but a coach does not want to prejudge a player.

A coach should have a good idea of what each player on the squad can do as far as running, throwing, fielding, and hitting are concerned. Pitchers fall into a special category, because of the different skills employed in their phase of the game. However, there is no reason why their running speeds cannot be determined.

Running is the easiest baseball skill to judge, because speed can be recorded by a stop watch. Unfortunately, there is no such device that can be used to determine a player's throwing, fielding, and hitting ability. The fact that a player can throw a ball a great distance does not mean necessarily that he is accurate. If he commits few errors, it does not indicate the amount of ground he covers. If he hits well in batting practice, it does not mean that he can hit a curve ball. Of course, good running speed does not always signify that a player is going to be a good baserunner. However, running is one skill that is used on both offense and defense. The same cannot be said of throwing, fielding, and hitting.

One way of judging a player's running speed is by using the "180." Instead of running the 220, 440, 660, which are computed

by yards, he runs the 180, which is measured in feet. This may be set up in the following manner. Measure a distance of 60 yards from home plate, past first base (thirty yards), straight down the right-field foul line. Have the players limber their legs before they run, to decrease the possibility of a pulled muscle or a charley horse, and then have them line up at home plate. An assistant coach or manager can start each player (one at a time) from home plate in a standing position—"Ready, get set, go!" The standing position is similar to the one a player assumes at first base when taking a lead. The player is facing third base and uses the cross-over step to start off. He runs straight down the base line to the right of the first base foul line and does *not* touch the bag. He runs as hard and fast as he can until he passes the coach with the stop watch.

The object of this race against time is to determine how fast each player can run 60 yards "straightaway." The shortest distance between two points is a straight line, and the player should run as straight as possible, on the balls of the feet, with his head up and arms pumping forward and backward. Proper running form is important.

The average running time for the mature player is 7.3 and 7.4 seconds, under normal track and weather conditions. The following scale can be used in judging the speeds of your players: above 7.9—hopeless; 7.9 to 7.7—zero; 7.6 and 7.5—average minus; 7.4 and 7.3—average; 7.2 and 7.1—average plus; 7.0 to 6.8—double plus, 6.7 or below—terrific, or triple plus. If younger players such as Little Leaguers are being timed, a rule to follow would be to *double the shortened distance between home plate and first base;* in other words, have the player run 40 yards, or 120 feet. A running scale for this distance would have to be determined. Ordinarily, a boy should be informed of his running time if he requests it.

Numbering Players

If the coach has a large squad to work with and does not know the names of the players, or if he prefers to keep them nameless so he will be in a better position to judge them more objectively, he may number them. The best way is to number by position. All pitchers would be numbered from 1 to 19, catchers 20 to 29, first basemen 30 to 39, second basemen 40 to 49, third basemen 50 to 59, and shortstops 60 to 69. All outfielders may be numbered above 70, or leftfielders 70 to 79, centerfielders 80 to 89, and rightfielders 90 to 99. If by some strange quirk of fate a coach found himself with a huge squad, he could number all pitchers in the 100's, all catchers in the 200's, and so forth. By numbering the players in this manner, the coach can readily see what position a boy plays, and he also knows the number of shortstops, catchers, etc., he has for practice.

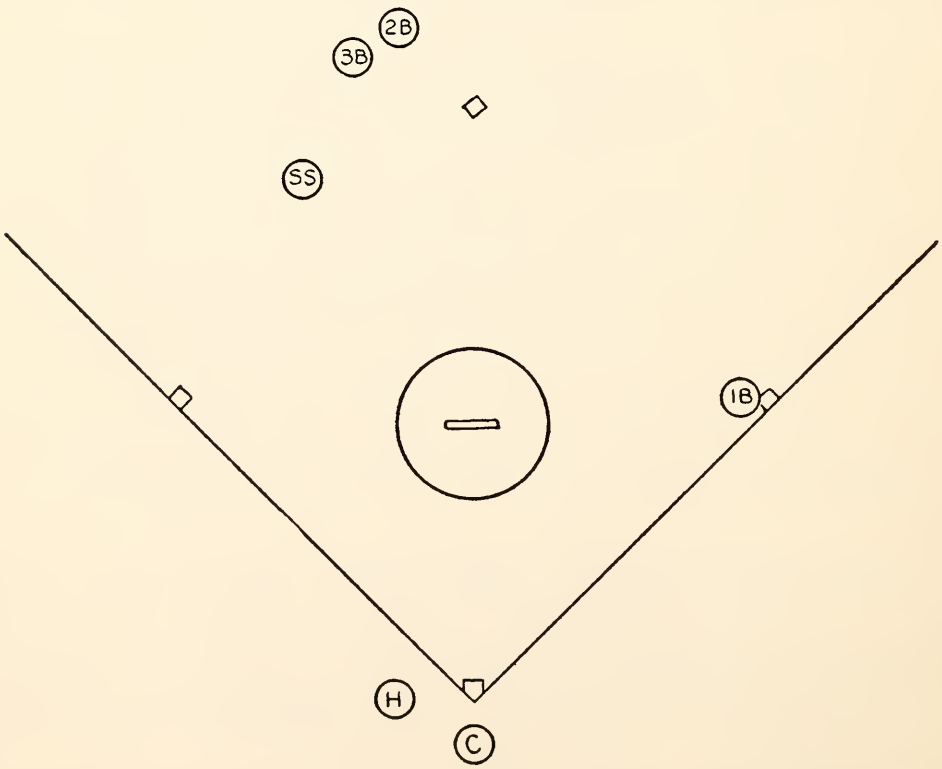
A coach can speed up his infield workouts by calling the "No. 1 unit" to practice. This means that all infielders, including catchers, who are wearing the lowest number in each bracket take the field. The next lowest numbers form the second infield, and this continues until all numbers and players have been called. This procedure is used quite satisfactorily at tryout camps and can be employed by a coach who is not familiar with his squad. Paper or canvas numbers can be made or obtained at various stores. These numbers should be fairly large, about six or eight inches high, and pinned on the back of each player with safety pins.

During infield practice, a coach can determine the skill of each player as far as fielding and throwing are concerned. After regular infield practice, all the infielders with the exception of the first baseman can be given the opportunity to field from the shortstop position. The shortstop has to make the longest throw, and the coach can get some idea of the relative strength of his infielders' arms. The easiest way to do this is to give each in-

fielder a turn at fielding several ground balls and making the throw to first base. The infielder does not cover second base after each play to take a throw from the catcher. He has already done this during regular infield practice (*Drills*, page 185). The fungo hitter should "chase" the infielder from side to side and make sure that several balls are hit in the hole toward third base, so that each player will have to make some long throws (*Infield Play*, page 111). The coach can have each infielder conclude his turn by fielding some slow-hit balls and making the proper play (*Infield Play*, page 130). After an infielder has completed his workout, the next player takes his turn.

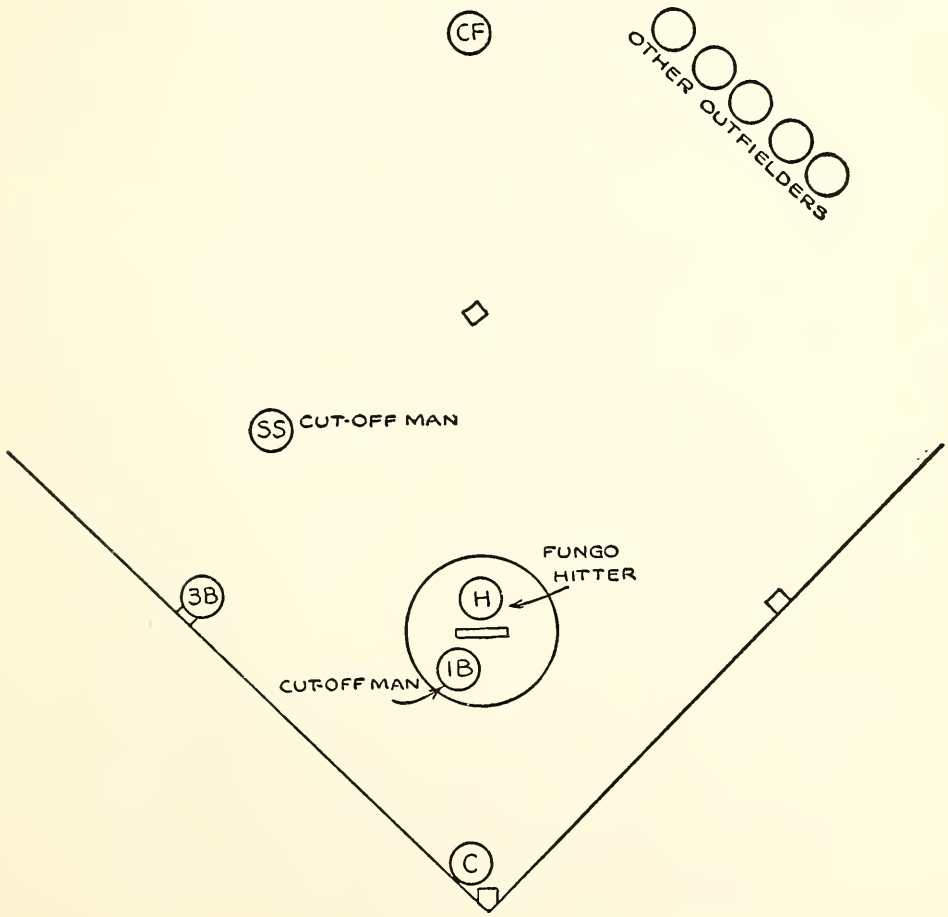
Before any practice begins, the coach should make sure that all the players who are to take part are thoroughly warmed up. This is particularly important when any throwing is to be done.

When the outfielders are ready to practice, the coach can get



In pre-season try-outs, let infielders show their merits by working out at short and making the long throw to first.

some idea of their merits by trying each one out in center field. The players are worked out one at a time until all have had a chance. The coach can station the first outfielder in medium center field and fungo him some flies and possibly some bounced line drives. The hitter can stand near the pitcher's mound to do this. He should not "chase" the player all over the outfield with his fungo hitting; he should make him move to some extent, but should try to hit the ball in such a manner that the fielder always can get into good throwing position. The outfielder should make several throws to third base, using the shortstop as a cut-off man. If the throws are any good at all, the shortstop lets them go through; otherwise he cuts them off. The outfielder should



Try all outfielders at center if you want to test their fielding and throwing abilities.

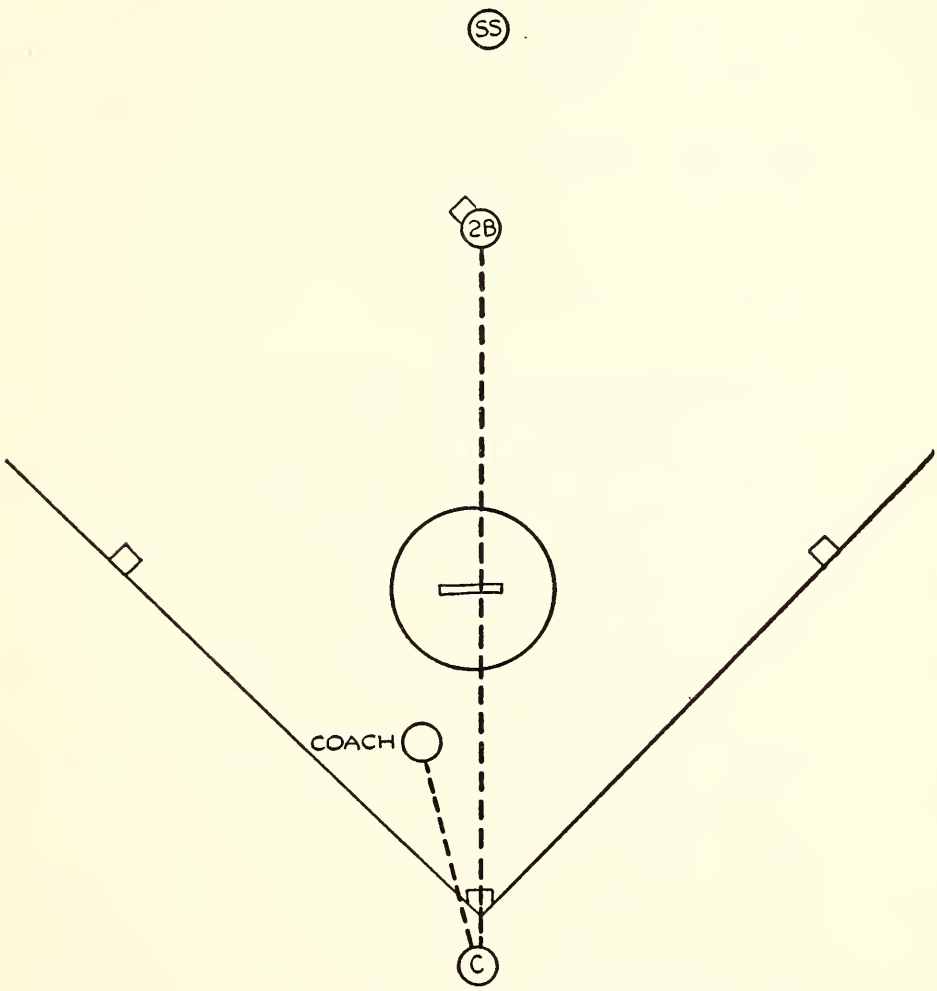
aim at the shortstop's head and the shortstop should be able to handle each throw. The shortstop stations himself in a direct line from the outfielder to third base and moves to line up each throw. He is approximately one-third of the distance from third base to second base and is used as a target by the outfielder, who should throw *at* him, not over him.

After the outfielder has completed his throws to third base, he should make several throws to home plate. The first baseman stands near the pitcher's mound and acts as the cut-off man. When throwing home, the outfielder should aim at the first baseman; because this throw may be too long for the ball to reach the cut-off man head high, it may have to be fielded on the bounce or after several bounces. In any event, the outfielder should not arch the ball to any great degree. Four throws to third base and four throws to home plate by each outfielder usually are enough for the coach to judge the strength of a player's arm.

In addition to the regular infield workout, the coach may use the following procedure to judge a catcher's arm. The catcher assumes his regular receiving position behind the plate, and the coach stands about 20 feet away from him, slightly toward the left side of the diamond. Acting as the pitcher, the coach throws a ball to the catcher, who fires it to second base where the shortstop or second baseman catches it. The catcher should take only one step when throwing. Three or four throws are all that are necessary to determine the strength and accuracy of a catcher's arm.

There are many intangible factors that enter into the performance of any athlete, and it is impossible to judge them all. However, the methods described will aid the coach in selecting the best players for the team. There is no substitute for experience, and it is impossible for anyone to give an infallible set of rules on how to select a team, when to bunt or hit away, when to bring in a relief pitcher, and the thousand and one things involved in a ball game. All that one can do is offer suggestions,

because each situation will be different. No two players are exactly the same, and no two instances are the same. Sometimes younger players do not realize what position they are best fitted for, and the coach must determine this. A player may have to



Test the catcher's arm by making him throw to second.

be shifted from one position to another because there is a wealth of material at one position and a dearth of material elsewhere. A team cannot play two shortstops at the same time. A coach must acquire a knowledge of the game, techniques, and skills to become successful.

Usually the best time to conduct hitting practice is at the end of the practice session. Hitting can take a very long time, especially if the pitcher cannot get the ball over the plate. The coach should try to impress the batting practice pitcher with the fact that his control is the most important feature for a good batting drill. This is a difficult thing to do, for many young pitchers try to show the coach how many batters they can strike out. It is ideal to give each player an opportunity to perform at every activity. However, if a boy is hopeless as a runner, thrower, and fielder, it is doubtful that he will make the grade on hitting alone.

The Schedule

At the beginning of the playing season, the pitchers probably will not be able to go nine innings, and it may be necessary to use three or four during a ball game. As soon as a pitcher has been relieved, it is best to send him into the clubhouse or locker room to shower and dress, to prevent him from catching cold while sitting on the bench. Once a player has been removed from a game, he is ineligible for further competition and can do little, if anything, to help his team win.

The strategy a coach will use during the course of the season, player changes, batting order, and pitching rotation, will have to be determined as the season progresses. The coach should have some idea of what he is trying to do, a knowledge of what players are in hitting streaks, and who is in a slump, but these and other factors are so variable that long-range planning often is impossible. He should be aware of all the existing conditions and have a reason for whatever action he takes.

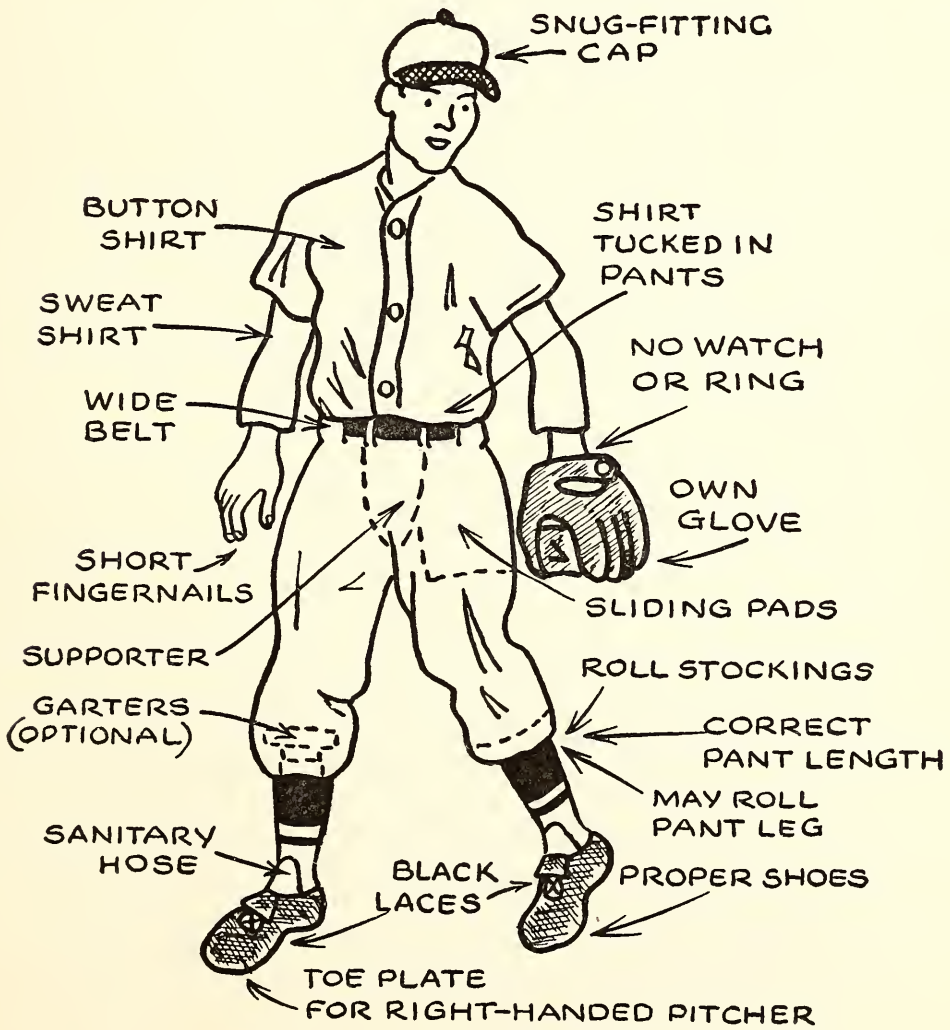
How to Dress

When someone is going to play baseball, he should look like a ballplayer. This does not mean he should be a fop or a dandy, but neither should he be sloppy or look like a tramp. There is a

correct way to wear a baseball uniform, just as there is a proper way to wear a suit of clothes, a sports outfit, or formal attire. A player does not need a lot of money to look his best in a baseball suit. There is little, if any, additional expense in improving one's appearance.

Here is a list of do's and don't's which will make you look better and help you act like a ballplayer, even though it may not make you play better.

1. *Wear shoes that fit.* Do not wear yellow laces. (They are



Ready to play ball.

not worn in organized ball and only attract attention to one's feet, which are usually rather big anyway.) A pitcher should make certain that the toe plate is on the pivot foot and on the inside of the foot. Strange as it may seem, there are players who do not know where the toe plate belongs!

2. *Sanitary hose or sweat socks should be worn underneath regular baseball stockings.* Do not wear colored socks for inner hose. If there are seams in the outer hose, make sure that they run up the backs of the legs. Do not have droopy stockings; use rubber bands, elastics, or adhesive tape to hold them up. These should be placed below the knee, not above. The upper part of the stockings may be rolled down below the knee.

3. *The bottom of the pants leg should come below the knee or down to the calf of the leg.* Don't wear them around the ankles. If pants legs are too long, they may be rolled by putting the pants on and then dropping them down to roll the bottoms to the inside. A handkerchief may be kept in the back pocket. It may be all right for the younger player to wear a regular belt with the uniform, but the older player should have a regular wide baseball belt.

4. *Always wear a supporter, and it may be wise to wear a cup.* Some form of sliding pads also should be worn.

5. *The shirt should be buttoned or zippered.* Keep the tail in the pants.

6. *Always wear a sweatshirt.* It does not necessarily have to be a long sleeved one, although pitchers should wear this type. The regular sweatshirt used by gymnasts, basketball players, etc., is not preferred because it is too bulky. A sweater is not satisfactory. How heavy a sweatshirt should be depends upon the weather, the physical condition of the player, and other factors. A pitcher always should have a jacket available.

7. *The uniform should fit properly.* It must be large enough.

8. *The cap should fit properly.*

9. *Equipment should be cared for at all times,* whether it

belongs to the individual or the team. A player should have his own personal equipment, particularly a glove.

10. *Do not wear watches or rings when playing.* Fingernails should be cut rather short. Fancy haircuts, sideburns, and mustaches are taboo.

11. *A player should not use any language or conduct that is unbecoming to good character.* His conduct will reflect on his family, school, church, and the organization which he represents.

12. *Don't smoke or eat during a game,* while on the bench, or in the bull pen.

13. *Take a shower after the game.*

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